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...Play for strolling mummers.



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PLAYS
FOR
STROLLING
MUMMERS



EDITED BY
FRANK SHAY

P L A Y S
for
STROLLING
MUMMERS

BOOKS BY FRANK SHAY

THE PRACTICAL THEATRE
ONE THOUSAND AND ONE
PLAYS FOR THE LITTLE THEATRE
A GUIDE TO LONGER PLAYS

DRAMATIC ANTHOLOGIES

*Compiled and edited
by Mr. Shay*

PLAYS FOR STROLLING MUMMERS

25 SHORT PLAYS (INTERNATIONAL)

TWENTY CONTEMPORARY
ONE-ACT PLAYS (AMERICAN)

FIFTY CONTEMPORARY
ONE-ACT PLAYS
(with Pierre Loving)

THE PROVINCETOWN PLAYS
(with George Cram Cook)

THE MODERN SERIES OF
ONE-ACT PLAYS
(in separate pamphlets)

Edited by FRANK SHAY

PLAYS
for
STROLLING
MUMMERS

NEW YORK
D. APPLETON AND COMPANY
MCMXXVI

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PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

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HARLEQUIN. [*In a honeyed voice.*] Good evening, ladies and gentlemen. [*Pause.*] Now, altogether say, "Good evening, Harlequin." Thanks. We must get this performance on a basis of intimacy before we can proceed. I *am* Harlequin, you know, one of the strolling players. I *am* the genuine Harlequin: all others posing as Harlequin are impostors. You see, I believe you are a genuine audience and before we go on I must have your assurance that you believe I am the genuine Harlequin.

VOICE IN THE AUDIENCE. Go on, skinny legs, we believe you.

HARLEQUIN. Thanks, first of all for the benefit of those who do not know us let me tell you about our players and our predecessors. The first mime was he who first jumped upon a table and made grimaces, sang songs, or told a story to amuse his audience. Little sense and less coherence attended his efforts until the founder of our order, Susarion, gathered them together and gave them a story to act. This was eight hundred years before the beginning of the Christian era. Later Susarion lodged his players in booths and charged admission and trailed them through the cities of old Greece. The comic poets, Magnes, Achæus and Timoc-

Prologue

reon were not too proud to write for us and gave us stories intermingled with cordaces and pantomime.

We invaded Rome where later we became known as the *commedia dell' arte* and many companies are still touring Italy. In Spain and France we found a hearty welcome and many of our representatives may be found bringing happiness to those little communities which would otherwise know no theater. It is known that Shakespeare was an early patron of our company and it is not difficult to conjure a picture of him holding Ann Hathaway's hand while Pierrot and Pierrette enacted their rôles.

America has seen but little of us. In recent years our task has undergone a slight change. Our early efforts were all devoted to bringing laughter and gayety to our audiences but we came upon those times that had an excess of these pleasures. Then the strolling players felt that a note of sorrow interjected in their lives would not be amiss. So, to-day, we come to you more as a corrective measure than anything else. Where we find too much sorrow we try to bring joy and happiness and where we find too much of these elements we bring a note of tragedy. Our repertory is fluid: we do not know what we are to play until we meet our audience. Without waiting to consult my confrères I would say that I feel it our task here to make you laugh and forget your troubles. Just why you should have troubles is more than I can fathom. You have fine homes, good food and clothing, automobiles, everything your heart desires yet you are not happy. I assure you that many of the most powerful kings and emperors before whom we have played have not been half so blessed as you and their subjects considered them the pampered darlings of fortune. Your

Prologue

careworn faces indicate that you must be made to laugh—

VOICE IN THE AUDIENCE. All right. Go ahead and make us happy.

HARLEQUIN. In a minute, my friend. I am trying to make my remarks as brief as possible. All of you, no doubt, have gone to theaters and witnessed plays vested in scenery of a marvelous splendor. You have seen the great players of the commercial theater enter upon their nightly labors with the same spirit that a night watchman approaches the scene of his nocturnal duties. Let me say right here that the strolling player works solely for the love of his work: his rewards are your appreciation and applause plus the few cents necessary to hold body and spirit together.

Our equipment is meager. No gay panoplies of scenic investiture cloak our efforts. No gorgeous smoke screens are thrown before your eyes to cover our deficiencies. What we have to give you is given nakedly and unashamed—

VOICE IN THE AUDIENCE. What kind of a show is this?

HARLEQUIN. [*Quickly.*] There will be nothing to offend the most delicate sense of what is right.

If you will let your eyes travel behind me you will observe that our stage comprises little more than a platform surrounded by curtains. With these curtains, some lamps and a few pieces of borrowed furniture we will try to convey the illusions demanded by the various authors of our plays.

If I may be pardoned I will take up but a moment or two more of your time to tell you how the strolling players secure their effects. These curtains are not unlike the conventional drapes save that they are not sewn together but hang in their original commercial

Prologue

widths. They are held together by snap-fasteners which enable our stage manager to place an entrance or exit at any point his scene plot may call for one. By parting the curtains thus and snapping the fasteners to the next member we secure an opening satisfactory for our requirements.

[HARLEQUIN *illustrates his words with actions.*]

Behind our back curtains we have a cyclorama, a plain drop painted blue and upon which we play various colored lights. With this cyclorama and these lights [*parts curtain and shows audience spot and flood lights mounted upon standards*], we secure any effect we desire. The lights are easily moved and by means of colored gelatine mediums, such as I hold in my hand, we can throw any tone of color needed in the action of a play. Over my head is a series of smaller lamps known as baby spots. These, too, have slots to accommodate the small color frames. You will observe, as our performance progresses, that the equipment before your eyes will undergo many transformations but no substitutions.

This compactness is due, in no small way, to the exigencies of modern travel, to the historical slenderness of our purses and to our firm belief that the play is the thing.

Our first piece will be a scene from our own lives. The play is called "Dancing Dolls" and portrays the lives of a group of strolling players in eighteenth-century France.

[HARLEQUIN *bows as the curtains close.*]

DANCING DOLLS

A Fantastic Comedy

BY KENNETH SAWYER GOODMAN

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DANCING DOLLS *

CHARACTERS

MARGOT

GILLES

FINETTA

BUFFO

CLEMENTINA

MEZZETIN

THE NOTARY

The Scene is the interior of a tent, used as a dressing-room by a company of strollers. At the back is a curtain, which cuts off the dressing-room from the stage, the edge of which is seen, raised upon saw-horses to a height of two and a half feet. There are wooden steps leading from the stage to the ground. At the right is a door, merely a flap in the canvas, which is supposed to be an entrance from outside; in other words, the stage door. At the opposite side is another flap leading to a smaller tent, used by the ladies of the company. There are several costumes lying on the backs of chairs, and a make-up table, equipped with a mirror and a large candle reflector, stands at left near the front.

As the curtain rises, BUFFO sits at a small table, a little to the right of the center, with his back to the stage door. GILLES is seated on the back of a chair across

* "Dancing Dolls" was first produced by the Department of the Drama of Carnegie Institute of Technology, at Pittsburgh, June 15, 1914, under the direction of Mr. Thomas Wood Stevens.

Plays for Strolling Mummers

the table from BUFFO and is telling him a funny story. BUFFO has a bouquet of flowers clasped in one hand and is laughing uproariously. Beside his chair is a covered basket. The music is playing faintly, as if a performance were going on behind the backcloth.

The Time is the late afternoon of a spring day early in the eighteenth century.

The Place is a country town, somewhere in the south of France.

BUFFO. Ho, ho! Ha, ha! That's the most comical thing I ever heard!

GILLES. Wait till I tell you the rest of it. There was the young count, with a bouquet of roses in one hand, and a leg of lamb in the other—

BUFFO. [*Slapping the table.*] Ho, ho! Ha, ha! Go on, go on!

GILLES. [*Illustrating his story by waving his arms.*] Bottles flying—just imagine it! Chairs breaking—all hell broken loose in a jiffy, like a what-do-you-call it in a crockery shop.

BUFFO. Splendid! Splendid! Ho, ho! Ha, ha!

[*He sways back and forth.*]

GILLES. [*Climbing down from his perch and striking a pose.*] I jumped between Mezzetin and the count. "Sir," I cried, "how dare you force your way into the ladies' dressing-room?"

BUFFO. [*Awestruck.*] You said that to a real count?

GILLES. We actors must stand on our dignity.

BUFFO. But didn't you get into trouble?

GILLES. Poof! We had supper together afterward.

BUFFO. You come in contact with *very* distinguished people.

GILLES. Artists come in contact with *everybody*.

Dancing Dolls

BUFFO. [*Leaning forward eagerly, his elbows on the table.*] You play before the nobility?

GILLES. In their own houses.

BUFFO. And the clergy?

[*He draws up his chair to the table and sits down.*]

GILLES. My dear sir, we have a morality play, all about the damnation of somebody-or-other. Mezzetin groans like a bull in real hell-fire. It always gets them.

BUFFO. I acted once, myself.

GILLES. [*Feigning amazement and admiration.*] Indeed?

BUFFO. [*Nodding his head.*] I was the clown in a tragedy.

GILLES. But I thought your vocation was raising poultry?

BUFFO. [*Proudly.*] I own the largest poultry farm in the county.

GILLES. You find poultry and the neighborhood congenial to a man of your refined tastes?

BUFFO. [*Sadly conscious of his superiority to his neighbors.*] Alas, no! I find them dull as mud. No one of culture to spend a quiet evening with. No one of finer feelings to criticize my poems.

GILLES. *What*, you're a poet, too?

BUFFO. I've written two poems and a play.

GILLES. You amaze me! Was the play given?

BUFFO. [*Shaking his head.*] No. It was rejected solely because it requires two elephants and a camel.

GILLES. Was it written in verse?

BUFFO. No. It was written in pantomime.

GILLES. You certainly amaze me! Why, a man of your talents could make a fortune in the profession.

BUFFO. [*Eagerly.*] Do you think so?

GILLES. [*Rising and again illustrating by gestures.*] Not a doubt of it! Take this company for instance.

Plays for Strolling Mummers

The investment isn't large. The profits are most satisfactory, and the personnel is charming. Mezzetin, the talented tragedian and sword-swallower, Margot, the delirious dancer, and—I kiss my hand to her—Finetta.

BUFFO. [*Rising, with the bouquet in his hand.*] Of course! That reminds me, I've brought this bouquet of roses to Mistress Finetta—I kiss my hand to her.

GILLES. *Bravo!* I see you have the grand manner.

BUFFO. There's a poem pinned to them.

GILLES. Never mind the poem.

[*He snatches the flowers from BUFFO and buries his nose in them.*]

BUFFO. [*Reaching for the flowers.*] But—but—

GILLES. Oh, immortal roses! Roses that die in a day, and live forever! There's joy in the breath of you; hint of all the dancing, and laughter, and scarlet lips of the world!

BUFFO. But, I say!

[*The music stops suddenly, and GILLES sinks into the chair.*]

GILLES. Oh, terrible roses! There's sadness in you, too. Tears in your hearts; scarlet tears for the loves we couldn't keep. There's the savor of the churchyard about you; hint of unfinished music, and tired feet, and aching eyes, and empty hands. Oh, roses, roses!

[*He tosses away the flowers, and clasps his hands.*]

BUFFO. Yes, yes! I think I said something about roses in my poem.

GILLES. [*Coming to himself.*] The devil! Ah, I'd forgotten you and your confounded poem.

BUFFO. [*Producing his basket.*] But, see here what else I've brought, just to make sure I'd please her. You can't make a meal off roses.

GILLES. Pray, sir, explain.

BUFFO. It's a cold roast capon; that's what it is!

Dancing Dolls

And a head of lettuce, and a bottle of red wine. Ha, ha! Ho, ho! Please the stomach, please the heart—that's my motto.

[The music strikes up again. There is a chatter of girls' voices, and clapping of hands. GILLES jumps up and seizes BUFFO's basket.]

GILLES. Quick now! Give it to me! The act's over. Mezzetin's swallowed his sword. I can't let him catch you here.

[He snatches the basket and sets it on the floor behind the table.]

BUFFO. Wait a minute! Wait a minute!

GILLES. *[Returning to Buffo.]* Out with you! Stir your stumps!

BUFFO. But, I say! Wait a minute! I want to speak to Mistress Finetta.

GILLES. *[Dragging at BUFFO's coat.]* Oh, for a team of horses! Out with you or I'll do something desperate.

[He pulls BUFFO to the door at the right. MEZZETIN enters from the stage, followed by the two girls. The music is still playing. MEZZETIN strikes an attitude.]

MEZZETIN. *[Flourishing his wooden sword.]*

'Twas thus I scaled the flaming breach of Troy,
While all the plain, a reeking sea of blood,
Gurgled below me.

Ha, who's this?

[He points to BUFFO.]

BUFFO. I—I—beg your pardon. I'm going.

[Exit BUFFO. GILLES sinks into a chair, laughing.]

MARGOT. *[Taking a turn on her toes.]* Who was the funny little man?

GILLES. Just a bigger fool than ourselves.

Plays for Strolling Mummers

MEZZETIN. [*Throwing off his cloak.*] In that case, I opine that the person has lent Gilles money.

[*He sits down at the make-up table, and preens himself before the mirror.*]

FINETTA. [*Fretfully.*] Don't we get any supper?

GILLES. [*Jumping up.*] That we do! I'll beat the drum while somebody cooks a little bean soup.

FINETTA. [*Turning on GILLES.*] I don't want any bean soup.

MARGOT. I am afraid there isn't anything else.

FINETTA. [*Stamping her foot.*] Then cook it yourself. I'm going to lie down.

[*She starts toward the door at the left.*]

MARGOT. Of course, I'll cook it if you won't.

GILLES. [*Picking up a clown's suit.*] There's a good girl—always ready to do her share of the work. [*To FINETTA, who has stopped and is eying MARGOT jealously.*] By the way, my dear, here's a nice pair of white what-you-may-call-'ems, minus part of the seat.

FINETTA. [*Stamping her foot again.*] You're always trying to have me mend something.

GILLES. But look at them, in the name of common decency!

FINETTA. Give them to Margot—she's a good girl—she's obliging—

GILLES. [*Backing away cautiously and picking up BUFFO'S flowers.*] Don't be huffy! See what I've bought for you—a nice bouquet of lovely thingumbobs!

[*He hands her the flowers.*]

FINETTA. I don't want the nasty flowers.

[*She throws them on the floor and flounces through door at left.*]

GILLES. [*Ruefully.*] Now, there's a devil of a temper for you!

Dancing Dolls

MEZZETIN. [*Leaning back with a gesture of evident self-satisfaction.*]

'Twas thus Adonis in the morning glow
Of Attic April set her heart aflame.

GILLES. [*Turning upon MEZZETIN.*] Your smirk is positively ridiculous.

MARGOT. What on earth has got into you?

MEZZETIN. [*Rising with alacrity and striking an attitude.*] The anticipation of a good time. The pleasurable sense of a perfectly unsought conquest! My friends, I am dining at the inn with a charming young lady. Poor little thing, how she adores me.

GILLES. [*Sarcastically.*] At her expense?

MEZZETIN. Certainly.

MARGOT. [*With a smiling attempt to appear unconcerned.*] Don't break her heart.

[*She takes the clown suit from GILLES and sits down to sew.*]

MEZZETIN. That's her affair.

THE NOTARY. [*Outside.*] Mr. Mezzetin! Oh, Mr. Mezzetin!

MEZZETIN. [*Going toward the door at the right.*] Ah, ha! It's my friend, the notary. Come in, come in, Mr. Notary. Damn it, where's my cloak?

[*He turns and looks for his cloak.*]

THE NOTARY. [*Entering timidly.*] I beg your pardon!

MEZZETIN. I'll be with you in a moment. [*He finds his cloak and throws it about his shoulders.*] A thousand pardons! My friends, Mr. Gilles and Mistress Margot. Two of the most talented artists in the profession.

GILLES. [*Making an exaggerated bow.*] Charmed!

MARGOT. [*Making an exaggerated curtsy.*] Delighted!

Plays for Strolling Mummers

THE NOTARY. [*With a tremendous effort to outdo both of them.*] Overwhelmed!

MEZZETIN. [*Impressively.*] You've heard me speak of my friend, the notary. He's been good enough to stop for me. He dines with us to-night, for the sake of propriety, at the Blue Pig.

THE NOTARY. A great honor—a great honor, I assure you! Are you ready, Mr. Mezzetin?

MEZZETIN. [*With a grand flourish.*] After you, my dear sir!

THE NOTARY. Overwhelmed!

MARGOT. Delighted.

GILLES. Charmed!

[*All of them repeat their bows. THE NOTARY goes out. MEZZETIN follows him but turns at the door to declaim.*]

MEZZETIN.

*Thus, Paris, musing on the Spartans' Queen,
With stately tread, approached the banquet hall.*

[*He goes out.*]

GILLES. [*Snappishly.*] Ha, ha! [*He turns to MARGOT.*] There's the devil of a chap for you! Well, it's one less mouth to feed here. [*He puts BUFFO'S basket on the table and begins taking out the contents.*] Never mind! There'll be no bean soup for us to-night, if we don't dine at the Blue Pig.

MARGOT. [*Laying down the clown's suit and rising.*] There, I've finished your patch. Now I'll be getting our supper.

GILLES. No need, my dear. Behold the table spread; the feast prepared! A cold roast capon, a head of lettuce, and a bottle of red wine.

MARGOT. [*Clapping her hands.*] Wizard! Where did they come from?

Dancing Dolls

GILLES. I took them out of the old drum, the way I take rabbits out of my hat at the fair.

MARGOT. Seriously?

GILLES. Seriously. Well, I bought them at the Blue Pig.

MARGOT. Honestly?

GILLES. Honestly. Well, to be quite honest, I stole them, basket and all.

MARGOT. [*Laughing.*] How delicious!

[*She pulls up her chair.*]

GILLES. Yes, aren't they? The butter is under that leaf of green stuff.

[*He sits down at the table.*]

MARGOT. How wonderful it would be to have such things every day! I ought to have been a farmer's wife.

GILLES. You ought to have been a duchess.

MARGOT. [*A little sadly.*] No, no! Just a plain farmer's wife, to sew and cook and scrub pans. To stay in one place all the time. Oh, it would be heavenly to work in a nice wet garden.

GILLES. With those little hands?

MARGOT. [*Pushing back her chair and turning away.*] Don't! Please don't tease me!

GILLES. There! There! Why, what's the matter with your eyes?

MARGOT. I'm tired—tired—I don't want to be teased.

GILLES. Child! Child! I'm not teasing you. I'll tell you a secret. *I'd* like to work in a garden, too. *I've* looked over the walls lots of times when we've been trundling along the roads. *I've* peeped through the little green gates in the hedges and wanted to be inside, digging and planting and pulling things up.

MARGOT. [*Drying her eyes.*] In those clothes? It's too ridiculous!

Plays for Strolling Mummers

GILLES. But I didn't always wear this rig, you know. I wasn't meant for this business we're in. I didn't always shout, and dance, and beat a drum, and juggle eggs. How I got into it, I don't know. Why I stay in it, I don't know. I'm always wishing and wishing—

MARGOT. [*Eagerly.*] What are you always wishing and wishing?

GILLES. [*Rather glumly.*] I don't know—something or other. That I could settle down some place where I'd never hear the sound of a drum.

MARGOT. What would Finetta say to that?

GILLES. Confound it! Of course, she'd say I was a fool! That girl's one of those what-do-you-call-'ems, those spinning things. You can't stop her without killing her.

MARGOT. I never dreamt you felt this way. It's fun to have some one to talk to.

GILLES. Oh, Lord—I suppose you're like the rest. A woman talks and talks and never knows what she wants. Now, take Finetta for example—

MARGOT. [*Tapping her foot.*] Oh, yes, Finetta—you can't get Finetta out of your head.

GILLES. I can't, eh? Well, maybe I can't. Never mind me. Cheer up and eat something.

MARGOT. [*Drawing up to the table again.*] Isn't it fun! Let me pour the wine.

GILLES. Splendid! Let's be domestic. Let's talk about cows, and chickens, and smelly barnyards.

MARGOT. And nice, cool, wet gardens.

GILLES. And a what-do-you-call-it, covered with vines, to sit under.

MARGOT. [*Thoughtfully.*] Do you suppose Mezzetin ever thinks of such things?

GILLES. There you go! Didn't I know it? We're all in the same boat. It's the old story! Everything

Dancing Dolls

jumbled up the wrong way. Everybody mismated. You and Mezzetin, Finetta and me. They're the gay ones; always on the go, happy-go-lucky; devil-may-care; not a trouble in the world. This sort of life's the very breath of their bodies. Look at Finetta!

MARGOT. Look at Mezzetin!

GILLES. All right, look at him! What do you see?

MARGOT. A human jumping-jack. He's all springs. He couldn't be happy unless he was dancing.

GILLES. [*Pleased, and becoming sure of himself.*] That's just it! There you are! Now look at us. We're quiet. We're domestic. We'd never dance at all if we didn't have to. If—

MARGOT. Well, but what's the answer?

GILLES. I don't know. That we fuss, and fume, and stick to it, I suppose. Wait! Yes, I do know, too! Look here—I've a great what-you-may-call it. Just popped into my head! You and I are beautifully suited to each other—make one another happy for life—I've just found it out in the last five seconds. It solves the whole thing. Why not quit together, and then start together?

MARGOT. [*Laughing.*] It might mean starting together, and then quitting separately.

GILLES. No, but seriously! I tell you I've made up my mind! I've thought it all out in detail. It's my mission in life to make you happy.

MARGOT. You've made your decision pretty suddenly.

GILLES. [*Jumping up.*] All great decisions are made just that way. Why, confound it, look at what's-his-name, the great African King. He decided to invade what-was-the-place? Well, never mind. He decided to invade it anyway, and made all his plans while he was eating a piece of tripe at breakfast. And see

Plays for Strolling Mummers

what happened! Why, he died Emperor of—Emperor of something-or-other, just because he had the courage of his convictions.

MARGOT. Well, what *are* your plans for my happiness?

GILLES. [*After a moment's reflection.*] I'll sell my interest in the show to Mezzetin.

MARGOT. But, Mezzetin hasn't any money!

GILLES. [*Wildly enthusiastic.*] Never mind! I'll sell it to somebody! We'll get married, and buy a castle, or a cottage, or a what's-its-name, and settle down on it, and raise thingumbobs or something for market.

MARGOT. But, Gilles, you've *got* to have more definite plans than *that*.

GILLES. Wait a minute! Don't hurry me! I've got something rattling around in my head. It'll all come out in a jiffy. I was talking to somebody, just a few minutes ago, about something.

BUFFO. [*Outside.*] Oh, Mr. Gilles! Oh, Mr. Gilles! May I come in?

GILLES. There! Listen! Where have I heard that voice before? Where *have* I heard that voice?

BUFFO. May I come in?

MARGOT. It's the little fat man.

GILLES. [*Going toward the door at the right.*] Of course, it is! Come in! Come in! Now I have it. I told you I had it all thought out!

[BUFFO enters. GILLES seizes his hand and drags him to the center of the stage.]

BUFFO. I—I beg your pardon for intruding again—

GILLES. My dear sir, you're the very man I've been waiting for.

BUFFO. But I only came to see if you had given my bouquet to Mistress Finetta?

GILLES. She was entranced.

Dancing Dolls

BUFFO. [*With increasing eagerness.*] And the poem?

GILLES. She was enraptured.

BUFFO. And the basket?

GILLES. [*Pointing to the table.*] You can see for yourself. She ate nearly all of it at one sitting.

BUFFO. [*Very eagerly.*] Might I speak to her now?

GILLES. Oh, my dear sir! She's inside there sleeping it off. You couldn't wake her if you banged a drum at her ear.

BUFFO. [*Disappointed, but nodding his head.*] I quite understand. I do the same thing myself after a heavy meal.

[*He starts toward the door at the right.*]

GILLES. [*Stopping him.*] Don't go. I want to talk with you.

[*He takes BUFFO'S arm.*]

BUFFO. But I'm afraid I'm intruding.

[*He looks at MARGOT and winks.*]

GILLES. By no means! This is my fiancée, Mistress Margot.

MARGOT. [*Rising and making a curtsy.*] Charmed to make your acquaintance.

BUFFO. [*Bowing awkwardly.*] Delighted, I'm sure.

[*MARGOT sits down again.*]

GILLES. Good, now you know each other. Well, sir, as you were saying—

BUFFO. I wasn't saying anything.

GILLES. [*His hand to his head.*] Of course not! I was saying something. Well, as I was saying—what was I saying?

MARGOT. That you had an idea.

GILLES. Yes, yes, yes! Now I have it! [*To BUFFO.*] You were telling me that you'd made up your mind to go on the stage.

Plays for Strolling Mummers

BUFFO. But, wait a minute. Wait a minute!

GILLES. In fact, you offered me a large sum for my share in this company!

BUFFO. [*Puzzled.*] I don't think we got as far as that. I don't remember that we got as far as that.

GILLES. Didn't we? That's strange! I seem to remember it quite distinctly. Never mind. I've decided to exchange my half-interest in this organization, all properties, costumes, musical instruments, scenery, and so forth, for your farm. No questions asked.

BUFFO. [*Sitting down.*] But I haven't had time to think.

GILLES. You'll never get such a chance again.

BUFFO. But, the other members of the company, do they agree?

GILLES. Absolutely! They retain their positions, of course.

BUFFO. [*Eagerly.*] And Mistress Finetta?

GILLES. She was delighted with the scheme.

BUFFO. [*Scratching his head.*] It's tempting—very tempting—but I really know very little about acting.

GILLES. There's very little to know. All you need is a good presence, and a fine voice, and control of your hands and feet. I can teach you everything in one lesson.

BUFFO. But—but—

GILLES. There's only two kinds of acting; tragic and comic.

BUFFO. I *did* act in a tragedy once.

GILLES. Good! That settles tragedy. There's only comedy left. It's very simple.

BUFFO. But *I* don't know anything about comedy. *I* couldn't be funny.

GILLES. Oh, yes, you could. You only need a few tricks to make people laugh.

Dancing Dolls

BUFFO. What else?

GILLES. Just a few jokes to keep them laughing.

BUFFO. What kind of jokes? I'm afraid I don't know any jokes.

GILLES. Oh, any old wheeze—one would do at a pinch. Let me think. There's a fine one, about a what's-its-name that got loose in a what-do-you-call-it. I'll tell you in a minute.

BUFFO. [*Dubiously.*] That *does* sound funny.

GILLES. You wink at the audience and say—confound it, what do you say? Never mind, I'll tell you later. Sir, I congratulate you! I congratulate you with all my heart!

[*He seizes BUFFO's hand and shakes it violently.*]

BUFFO. [*Winning, and pulling away his hand.*]
But, my dear Mr. Gilles, let me explain.

GILLES. What! You're not satisfied?

BUFFO. [*Working his right hand as if it had been injured.*] I'm trying to tell you. I don't want any misunderstanding. I only own *half* the poultry farm. The other half belongs to a young lady, a cousin of mine. It's because of her that I'd like to sell out. She want's to marry me.

GILLES. Which half do you own?

BUFFO. Do you mean the largest half, or the smallest half?

GILLES. No, no! I mean do you own the flat part—the what's-it-name—or the thingumbobs—what sticks up from it?

BUFFO. [*Completely puzzled.*] Do you mean which half, dividing it north and south, or which half dividing it east and west?

MARGOT. [*Clasping her hands.*] Do you own the nice wet garden?

GILLES. Do you own the house?

Plays for Strolling Mummers

BUFFO. Wait a minute! Let me get this straight.

GILLES. [*Impatiently.*] There's only two sides to a house; the inside and the outside. Which side do you own?

BUFFO. [*Almost in tears.*] I don't know, we inherited it. It wasn't mentioned in the will.

GILLES. Never mind! We'll settle that with your cousin when we move in.

BUFFO. It does sound simple.

GILLES. Here's my hand on the agreement. I congratulate you, sir! Nothing else to say.

[*He makes a grab for BUFFO's hand. BUFFO draws it away. GILLES unabashed slaps him heartily on the back.*]

BUFFO. [*Doubtfully.*] Thank you! Thank you very much!

MARGOT. But aren't there some formalities?

GILLES. Of course! How stupid of me. There's a thingumajig to sign before—before a—

BUFFO. A transfer to sign before a notary.

GILLES. Yes, yes, yes! A transfer to sign before a notary. Wait a minute! Didn't I see one of 'em here awhile ago?

MARGOT. Mezzetin's friend.

GILLES. I knew I'd think of it. We'll go and find him.

[*He starts toward the door, picking up BUFFO's hat.*]

BUFFO. [*Stupidly.*] But—but—stop a minute.

GILLES. [*Clapping the hat on BUFFO's head.*] Here's your hat. Come on, Margot.

[*He pulls BUFFO out of his chair. MARGOT rises to follow them. FINETTA enters at the left. BUFFO sees her and holds back.*]

Dancing Dolls

BUFFO. There's Mistress Finetta. I want to speak to her!

GILLES. [*Pulling at BUFFO's arm.*] She's only come back to eat more food. You'll see plenty of her later.

[*He pushes BUFFO out and follows him.*]

FINETTA. [*To MARGOT.*] Where are you going?

MARGOT. [*Carelessly.*] Oh, out to take a little stroll.

FINETTA. [*Fretfully.*] Didn't you cook any supper for me?

MARGOT. You'll find something left on the table.

[*She goes out.*]

FINETTA. [*Looking at the remains of the feast.*] Pigs! Greedy pigs!

[*She sets the things to rights, and sits down as if wondering which of the remnants she will try to eat. MEZZETIN sticks his head in at the opening of the back curtain.*]

MEZZETIN. [*In a whisper.*] Hist! Finetta! Anybody here?

FINETTA. [*Sullenly.*] Not a soul!

MEZZETIN. [*Entering with an angry flourish.*] It's lucky for Gilles that he's out of my sight! I'd do him a terrible injury. I've never been so insulted in my life.

[*He strides up and down with gestures of rage.*]

FINETTA. [*Not at all impressed.*] Stop beating your chest and tell me what's the matter.

MEZZETIN. That notary is a perfect ass, if there ever was one.

FINETTA. What notary?

MEZZETIN. [*Flourishing a piece of paper.*] Why, the note who gave me this notary—I mean, the notary who gave me this note! Confound his stupidity! He

Plays for Strolling Mummers

gave it to the wrong man. She didn't even offer me a glass of beer.

FINETTA. [*Coolly.*] I haven't the least idea of what you're talking about.

MEZZETIN. [*Throwing off his cloak.*] I'm talking about a stage-struck fool of a country girl; the village heiress, to judge by the looks of her. She's ugly enough to own half the district.

FINETTA. What did she want?

MEZZETIN. What did she want? Why, the dolt's fallen in love with that drum-beating numskull, that wooden-faced clown, that egg-juggling Gilles.

FINETTA. Well, what of it?

MEZZETIN. I tell you, I got the cold shoulder from a woman for the first time in my life.

FINETTA. Oh, is that all!

MEZZETIN. [*Turning on her.*] It is not. She had the effrontery to ask me to run back and fetch him. Then she had the consummate audacity to make me a purely business proposition. She offered to exchange her share of a country estate for my share of this theatrical enterprise, solely to be near that grinning shrimp, that clumsy, infernal buffoon that hasn't a spark of true tragic art in his entire carcass.

FINETTA. [*Sarcastically.*] I suppose you fell on her neck.

MEZZETIN. I merely drew myself up and left the room with becoming hauteur.

FINETTA. Huh!

MEZZETIN. [*Noticing the food for the first time.*] . Who's been having a feast here?

[*He draws up a chair and sits down.*]

FINETTA. Margot and Gilles.

MEZZETIN. [*Tipping up the wine bottle.*] Wouldn't you know it? Not a drop left. That's the gratitude

Dancing Dolls

of the world. Dancing Dolls like Gilles and Margot always getting the best of everything; while true artists are equally sure to always come out at the small end of the horn.

FINETTA. [*Helping herself out of the basket.*] I don't suppose Margot ever had a truly spiritual thought in her life.

MEZZETIN. [*With a gesture of superiority.*] Poof! They have no fine feelings, no dignity of soul, no sense of the all-pervading spirit of tragedy.

FINETTA. Oh, I'm tired of it! I wish I never had to see Gilles again.

MEZZETIN. [*Beginning to eat.*] Tush! It's the old story. Every one mismated. Lovers unhappy. You and Gilles, Margot and I. It's the tragic rectangle.

FINETTA. But *we're* the only unhappy ones. It doesn't seem fair!

MEZZETIN. [*His mouth full.*] I shall retire to private life. If the public won't appreciate me, let it do without me. In some isolated retreat, I shall muse upon the terrible cosmic hollowness, the futility of tragic genius.

FINETTA. But what about *me*? What's to become of *me*?

MEZZETIN. [*Gloomily.*] I see it all. You shall be my wife. We will forget the sneers of the world. Our mutual unhappiness makes us marvelously suited to each other.

FINETTA. But what are we going to live on?

MEZZETIN.

*Thus, Cæsar, musing on the shattered gods,
Forsook the rostrum for the lonely hills.*

[*He thinks for a moment, then slaps his knee.*]

I will sell my interest in this company to Gilles.

FINETTA. But Gilles hasn't any money!

Plays for Strolling Mummers

MEZZETIN. True! Let me think.

CLEMENTINA. [*Outside.*] Oh, Mr. Gilles! Mr. Gilles, are you there?

MEZZETIN. [*Startled.*] Ah!

FINETTA. Who's that?

MEZZETIN. [*Jumping up.*] It's the village heiress! It's the solution of our difficulty!

CLEMENTINA. [*At the door.*] Mr. Gilles! Oh, Mr. Gilles! May I come in?

[*She enters at the right.*]

MEZZETIN. [*Bowing.*]

'Twas thus Aurora, with her golden smile.

Awoke new summer in the heart of Mars.

CLEMENTINA. [*Taken aback at seeing MEZZETIN.*] I—I beg your pardon, I was looking for Mr. Gilles.

MEZZETIN. I've just sent him to meet you at the inn. Permit me!

[*He offers her a chair.*]

CLEMENTINA. [*Very bashfully.*] I—I'm afraid I'm intruding.

MEZZETIN. [*Quite at his ease.*] Allow me to present my fiancée, Mistress Finetta. My dear, this is the young lady I've been telling you about, the charming young lady with such remarkable dramatic talents.

[*He hands CLEMENTINA into the chair. She sits down stiffly, with evident embarrassment.*]

CLEMENTINA. You're very kind, Mr. Mezzetin. I thought you were angry with me when you left the Blue Pig in such a hurry.

MEZZETIN. [*In an injured tone.*] Angry at you! Oh, my dear young lady, how very absurd! I was merely anxious to consult Mistress Finetta, as promptly as possible, about our little transaction.

CLEMENTINA. [*Looking stupidly at FINETTA.*] Business transaction?

Dancing Dolls

MEZZETIN. She's enchanted with the arrangement.

CLEMENTINA. Arrangement?

MEZZETIN. I exchange my interest in this organization, including all scenery, costumes, properties, musical instruments and live stock, for your country estate. Madame, I congratulate you!

CLEMENTINA. But, Mr. Mezzetin—oh dear—I hardly know—

MEZZETIN. Now, now! Pray don't overwhelm me with your thanks.

CLEMENTINA. [*Wringing her hands.*] Oh, dear, I hardly know what to say! I hardly know anything about acting—I'm afraid I've made a mistake—I hardly know anything at all.

MEZZETIN. Don't distress yourself. A woman's success on the stage isn't purely a matter of technique. It's appearance that counts; an appearance like yours, an emotional disposition—it's really better if she doesn't know anything.

CLEMENTINA. Oh, dear! Oh, dear! What will Mr. Gilles say, if he thinks I'm running after him?

MEZZETIN. He's overjoyed.

CLEMENTINA. It is a temptation—Oh, dear! Oh, dear! I hardly know what to do.

MEZZETIN. [*Picking up his cloak.*] Bravo! Then it's all settled. I'll look for our friend, the notary. Madame, I congratulate you with all my heart!

[*There is a sound of voices outside.*]

FINETTA. [*Listening.*] There's the notary now.

MEZZETIN. [*Rubbing his hands.*] Good! He can draw up the documents.

CLEMENTINA. [*Much excited.*] Oh, dear! Oh, dear! I hear Mr. Gilles's voice.

GILLES. [*Outside.*] It doesn't matter at all, sir, it doesn't matter at all! The what-you-may-call-it's of no

Plays for Strolling Mummers

consequence whatever. It's the thingumajig that counts.

[*Enter the NOTARY and GILLES, arm in arm, followed by MARGOT and BUFFO.*]

THE NOTARY. But there are certain legal points of a most delicate nature. The *locus tenantibus* for example, and the *fides in particularum*.

[MEZZETIN *spreads his cloak to hide CLEMENTINA.*]

MARGOT. Never mind the *tenantibus* and the *particularum*. It's the garden I want to know about!

BUFFO. I can't seem to get this all straight!

MEZZETIN. [*Seizing THE NOTARY'S hand.*] My dear friend! My very dear friend!

[*He keeps between CLEMENTINA and the others.*]

THE NOTARY. Pray, sir, don't distract my attention!

MEZZETIN. But this is most urgent! Here's a young lady that's just induced me to purchase her share of a country estate and she's naturally most anxious to close the transaction before I alter my mind.

THE NOTARY. Dear, dear! This is most confusing! May I ask, sir, to what young lady you refer?

MEZZETIN. [*Stepping back and disclosing his prize.*] The young lady will speak for herself.

BUFFO. Clementina!

[THE NOTARY *puts his glasses on and recognizes CLEMENTINA.*]

THE NOTARY. Dear, dear! This is most confusing.

CLEMENTINA. [*Rising.*] Oh, Mr. Notary, I hardly know how to explain. Oh, dear! I hardly know anything at all.

[*She sinks back again into the chair.*]

THE NOTARY. Ah, that's better! That's much better! When one asks for legal advice, one isn't expected to know anything.

GILLES. [*To MEZZETIN.*] Confound it all! Just

Dancing Dolls

when I have the what-do-you-call-it all figured out, you go and stick *your* nose into it. Can't you wait till I've finished my business with the what's-his-name here?

MARGOT. But I thought it *was* all settled. We're to get the nice wet garden.

GILLES. Of course, it's all settled; all but signing the what-do-you-call-it. We're to have the inside of the house.

MEZZETIN. [*Advancing upon GILLES.*] *We? We?* May I ask whom you mean by *we*?

MARGOT. Gilles and I have bought a farm. We're going to be married and settle down.

MEZZETIN. [*In a rage.*] Ten Thousand Thunders! Do you mean to tell me that you're thinking of marrying that numskull? That you're deliberately deserting me; that you've actually forgotten all sense of loyalty and gratitude?

GILLES. [*Also becoming angry.*] Hold your horses there! Hold your horses!

MEZZETIN. [*To GILLES.*] Don't come in my way, knave, or I'll crack your head like one of your wooden eggs. I'll beat you within an inch of your silly life! I'll teach you to ruin my happiness!

[*The two men glare at each other.*]

FINETTA. [*Wringing her hands.*] Oh, dear! Oh, dear!

MARGOT. Don't let them hurt each other!

CLEMENTINA. [*To MEZZETIN.*] But I thought you wanted to buy my share of the farm so that you could marry Mistress Finetta.

GILLES. What's that? You marry Finetta! Damn it, you've been trying to steal her affections behind my back.

[*He moves toward MEZZETIN.*]

Plays for Strolling Mummers

MEZZETIN. [*Backing away from him.*] Let's look at this thing rationally!

MARGOT. [*Running to MEZZETIN.*] I won't stand by and see you hurt!

FINETTA. [*Running to GILLES.*] Don't, oh, don't do anything rash!

CLEMENTINA. [*Running to BUFFO.*] O Buffo! Buffo! O Saint Stephen, and Saint Edgar!

BUFFO. [*Clasping her in his arms.*] I can't seem to get this straight.

[*FINETTA clings to GILLES, who glares at MEZZETIN. MARGOT clings to MEZZETIN, who looks sheepish. CLEMENTINA clings to BUFFO who looks completely mystified.*]

THE NOTARY. [*Wringing his hands.*] Dear me! Dear me! This is most confusing! Here's Mr. Buffo and Madame Clementina, joint owners in a poultry farm. Here's Mr. Gilles and Mistress Margot have bought Mr. Buffo's share, and here's Mr. Mezzetin and Mistress Finetta have bought Madame Clementina's share, and here's Mr. Buffo and Madame Clementina have bought a whole theatrical company.

BUFFO. I can't seem to get this straight at all.

THE NOTARY. Dear me! Dear me! I never remember such a rush of business. Two transactions in one day. That means seven hundred and thirty transactions in a year. If it goes on like this, I shall be a rich man.

[*The music strikes up again outside.*]

MARGOT. [*Pricking up her ears.*] Listen!

GILLES. It's time for the evening performance.

MEZZETIN. Zounds! I had quite forgotten it!

FINETTA. So had I!

[*They begin to dance a little in pairs.*]

Dancing Dolls

MARGOT. [*To MEZZETIN.*] Then you won't desert me?

GILLES. [*To FINETTA.*] Then you love me after all?

MEZZETIN. Come, the audience is waiting!

FINETTA. [*Hopping up and down.*] I feel just like dancing!

[*They all join hands and circle around BUFFO, CLEMENTINA, and THE NOTARY, who stand huddled together in the center of the stage.*]

MARGOT. Come on, everybody!

GILLES. Right you are!

MEZZETIN. Come on! Come on!

FINETTA. Come on!

MARGOT. Hurrah!

GILLES. We're off!

MEZZETIN. Hooray!

FINETTA. Ho, ho!

[*They let go of hands and run off through the back curtain, laughing. BUFFO wipes his face with a red handkerchief.*]

THE NOTARY. Dear, dear, dear! Everything seems most confusing!

BUFFO. I never will be able to get this straight.

CLEMENTINA. [*Clinging to BUFFO.*] Hadn't we better keep the poultry farm and get married right away?

BUFFO. *There!* You've hit the nail on the head!

CURTAIN



HARLEQUIN. In behalf of the players I thank you for your applause. I might add that to-day we eat with a greater regularity but there are times when we must worry about the whereabouts of our next meal. Speaking of meals reminds me that in our repertoire we have a play that is concerned wholly with food. Drama, as we understand it, is a conflict of character. May we not suppose for our immediate purpose that considering the various characters of food that if they are brought into direct conflict they will create a drama?

Let us take a meal. Just an average meal. If the various elements of this dinner do not appeal to you as average please remember that we strolling players do not enjoy the rich viands that grace the tables of our audiences. A steak, rich, juicy and tender, is the final word in food to us and if any member of the audience wishes to make us inexpressibly happy let him produce one.

The dinner from which we will evoke a drama will comprise a small steak, a baked potato, a slice of cucumber, a piece of celery, a slice of bread, a glass of milk, a bunch of grapes and a bonbon. There is, of course, that permanent resident of the stomach, gastric juice. So that we will not be compelled to resort to the soliloquy in the development of our thesis we will

Prologue

divide this dweller in our midst into two characters: Old Gastric Juice and Young Gastric Juice. The scene is, of course, the interior of a very healthy and extraordinarily clean stomach.

Watch closely as the curtains part and you will see how simply we have changed the locale from the interior of a tent to the interior of a stomach.

The play, by the way, we will call "Inside Stuff."

[HARLEQUIN *bows and the curtains close.*]

INSIDE STUFF

A Gastronomical Fantasy

BY THEODORE PRATT

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INSIDE STUFF

CHARACTERS

YOUNG GASTRIC JUICE	SLICE OF BREAD
OLD GASTRIC JUICE	GLASS OF MILK
BAKED POTATO	SLICE OF CUCUMBER
PIECE OF CELERY	BUNCH OF GRAPES
SMALL STEAK	BONBON

The Scene is a well-known interior, more easily recognizable not from its appearance as from what is going to take place in it. The appearance, however, is very pleasant, clean, bright, and cheery. It gives, indeed, a first and lasting impression that it must belong to some very nice person, who believes in neatness and scrubbing. This impression becomes a certainty when we note the details of the interior. The walls are of a pleasing yellow, smooth and round at the back and at the sides, which come down and around to the edges of the opening in front, which we see in such a manner that it seems we are looking into a huge egg with part of one side cut away. At left, rear, there is an open chute which extends up into the left wall and disappears into an opening there. This is the entrance from the outside world, a much inferior world than the one on view, though, as we shall see, the inhabitants of this one, transient and permanent, do not seem to appreciate it. At rear, right, there is a small door. Above this door is a sign, "Entrance to the Digestive Tubes," in large

Plays for Strolling Mummers

letters, and below, in smaller letters, "Follow the Black Line." There is a couch, with orange and yellow covers, at left, and another at right.

It is just before the arrival of dinner, the chief event in the day of this interior. The light, which gives a shadowy effect of unreality to the place, shows us everything there is to see. On each of the couches there seems to be something or some one lying down. In a moment the object on the couch at right stirs, moans, and sits up. It is YOUNG GASTRIC JUICE. He yawns and stretches his arms, and after looking about throws off a long orange cover and jumps to his feet. He is clad in a costume of yellow, goldenrod, gold, bronze, and burnt orange, with splashes of vivid scarlet and bright rose here and there. He proceeds to jump about a bit to limber himself up. He looks at the object still recumbent on the couch at left and then returns to his own couch and obtains there a perfume atomizer. He goes to center and begins to spray the air. While he is doing so the object on the couch at left goes through the motions of slowly coming to life in a rather feeble way. He throws off the things which have been covering him and sits on the edge of the couch, his eyes tightly closed. This is OLD GASTRIC JUICE. He is dressed in the same fashion as YOUNG GASTRIC JUICE, except that the colors of his costume are faded and pale, like OLD GASTRIC JUICE himself, and he has a white beard.

OLD GASTRIC JUICE. [*Yawning and stretching.*]
Oh-h—uh, oh-h-h. . . .

YOUNG GASTRIC JUICE. [*Still spraying.*] Get up, old man. It's time for work.

Inside Stuff

OLD GASTRIC JUICE. [*His eyes still closed.*] Oh-h—is that you, my boy?

YOUNG GASTRIC JUICE. [*A little impatiently.*] Yes, yes. You ought to be up. It's nearly dinner time.

OLD GASTRIC JUICE. What are you doing?

YOUNG GASTRIC JUICE. I'm getting the air ready. Come on, hurry up; you've got to help.

OLD GASTRIC JUICE. Oh—ho. . . . [*He gets his eyes open.*] There! I've got them open! [*Hunting about on the couch for his atomizer.*] Dinner time again! What a life!

[*He finds his atomizer, gets up in a very leisurely way, begins also to spray the air.*]

YOUNG GASTRIC JUICE. Well, you don't think I like it any better than you do, do you? Slaving down here in this hole, three meals a day, year in and year out!

OLD GASTRIC JUICE. Oh, I don't kick about the work. I've been at it too long. We were made for it and we've got to do it. If you're a gastric juice, you're a gastric juice, that's all, the same as if a person's a man, he's a man. [*Contemptuously pointing upward.*] Like this one.

YOUNG GASTRIC JUICE. You're always kicking about him, and his stomach. What's the matter with them?

OLD GASTRIC JUICE. [*Stopping his work and looking at the YOUNG GASTRIC JUICE.*] What's the matter with them? What's right with them? This frail, puny thing—ah, my boy, you are very young—

YOUNG GASTRIC JUICE. [*With a wave of the hand, youth's deprecation of being accused of youth.*] Oh, well. . . .

OLD GASTRIC JUICE. If you could have lived in the times I have lived in, and worked in the stomachs I have worked in!

Plays for Strolling Mummers

YOUNG GASTRIC JUICE. Were they much better than this one?

OLD GASTRIC JUICE. Much better? My boy, there was no comparison. I once worked in the stomach of Mark Antony! There was a stomach for you! What a beautiful spot it was! And what times we used to have there! [*Adding a condition.*] That is, when he was home. For when Mark Antony was in Rome he did as the Romans did, but when he was in Egypt he did what the Egyptians did.

YOUNG GASTRIC JUICE. I've read about his Egyptian trip. Wasn't there a woman mixed up in it?

OLD GASTRIC JUICE. My boy, there is a woman mixed up in everything. The only thing I didn't like about Cleopatra was the stuff she used to feed Mark Antony. It kept us working day and night, and then we didn't know what to do with most of it. Peacock's brains, crocodile's liver, hornet's feet, plover's breasts, and the throats of buzzards—ah! They were almost as bad as the things this man sends down.

YOUNG GASTRIC JUICE. Why did she have all those strange things to eat?

OLD GASTRIC JUICE. Because she was beautiful.

YOUNG GASTRIC JUICE. Must a person eat such things to be beautiful? Why, the first job I ever had was with a beautiful girl, and she didn't have things like that. In fact, she was trying to get a part as an actress and some days she didn't have anything to eat at all.

OLD GASTRIC JUICE. Peacock's brains were not strange in the days of Cleopatra. Ideas change, my boy, through the ages, like government, or religion, or clothes. There is only one thing that never changes. That's love.

YOUNG GASTRIC JUICE. Love—?

Inside Stuff

OLD GASTRIC JUICE. Have you ever been in love?

YOUNG GASTRIC JUICE. No—I can't say that I have.

OLD GASTRIC JUICE. You have never loved anybody?

YOUNG GASTRIC JUICE. No.

OLD GASTRIC JUICE. What a happy soul is here!

YOUNG GASTRIC JUICE. [*Inquiringly.*] Why do you say that?

OLD GASTRIC JUICE. Because, my boy, love is a terrible thing.

YOUNG GASTRIC JUICE. What happens when you are in love?

OLD GASTRIC JUICE. Everything. Nothing. A lot of things you never expect could happen.

YOUNG GASTRIC JUICE. It must be very interesting.

OLD GASTRIC JUICE. Sometimes it is. I once was in love with a chicken-wing, a pretty little thing. She had the bluest of eyes and the whitest of skin. I was young then, like you, and I adored her—until she ran away with a piece of turkey on Thanksgiving Day. Then there was the Irish potato I fell in love with. We promised eternal devotion and an hour later she eloped with a fried egg. Women are fickle things, my boy. Take my advice and never fall in love.

YOUNG GASTRIC JUICE. [*A little eagerly.*] I should like to know how it feels. Tell me more about your love affairs.

OLD GASTRIC JUICE. No. Let's talk of something pleasant. [*Contemptuously, and looking upward.*] Such as what he's going to send down to us to-night.

YOUNG GASTRIC JUICE. I hope he hasn't gone to the Presto Lunch again.

[*There is a sliding noise from above.*]

OLD GASTRIC JUICE. Here comes something.

[*They turn to look at the chute at left.* BAKED

Plays for Strolling Mummers

POTATO *slides down the chute, lands in a heap at the bottom, and climbs awkwardly to her feet, dazed. She is stumpy and heavy in appearance, with odd-shaped eyes on all sides of her.*]

OLD GASTRIC JUICE. A baked potato. [*To YOUNG GASTRIC JUICE.*] He must have been invited out to dinner.

POTATO. [*In a cracked, old woman's voice.*] Oh! Oh! What has happened to me? Where am I?

OLD GASTRIC JUICE. [*Going to her.*] You have arrived in the stomach, madam, where the gastric juices will entertain you—

[*He sprays her with his atomizer.*]

POTATO. [*Backing away, right.*] Oh! Oh! Don't do that! [*YOUNG GASTRIC JUICE sprays her with his atomizer.*] Oh! Oh! You are killing me!

YOUNG GASTRIC JUICE. [*Standing her at right.*] There! That's all for the present. We'll stand you here to soak a bit.

[*BAKED POTATO, ill and miserable, stands dejectedly moaning and groaning and looking about in all directions with her queer eyes. YOUNG GASTRIC JUICE begins to go left, and as he does so PIECE OF CELERY slides down the chute and lands in a fragile white heap on the floor. She springs, wide-eyed, to her feet near OLD GASTRIC JUICE. PIECE OF CELERY is a slim, pretty girl clad in long streamers of white, with a dainty headdress of waving ostrich plumes.*]

OLD GASTRIC JUICE. [*Spraying her with his atomizer.*] A nice little piece of celery.

CELERY. [*Shrinking back.*] Where am I? Oh! You hurt me! You hurt me! Why did you do that?

[*As CELERY backs away from OLD GASTRIC JUICE to YOUNG GASTRIC JUICE, YOUNG GASTRIC JUICE*

Inside Stuff

raises his atomizer to spray her. As he does so she turns and their faces meet. Their eyes hold each other's for a few silent seconds, and YOUNG GASTRIC JUICE lowers his atomizer.]

YOUNG GASTRIC JUICE. Why—why. . . .

CELERY. [*Looking at him.*] You won't hurt me, will you? Say you won't hurt me!

YOUNG GASTRIC JUICE. [*Slowly, looking at her.*] I won't hurt you.

CELERY. Oh, thank you! He hurt me terribly, and you won't—?

YOUNG GASTRIC JUICE. [*Fascinated by her.*] I don't want to hurt you.

CELERY. Oh, I like you!

YOUNG GASTRIC JUICE. I wouldn't hurt you for the world.

CELERY. I'm sure I like you! And you—do you like me?

YOUNG GASTRIC JUICE. Yes. I—

OLD GASTRIC JUICE. [*Who has been watching them, interrupting.*] Be careful, my boy! You are walking on dangerous ground. Here—I'll spray her a little. . . .

[*He makes as if to do so. CELERY gives a cry.*]

YOUNG GASTRIC JUICE. [*Springing before her.*] No! Don't touch her!

OLD GASTRIC JUICE. My boy! My boy! Do you know what is happening to you?

YOUNG GASTRIC JUICE. It doesn't matter. I don't want you to touch her.

OLD GASTRIC JUICE. And why not? Tell me, why not?

YOUNG GASTRIC JUICE. Because— [*He looks at CELERY.*] I love her!

[OLD GASTRIC JUICE *bursts into laughter.*]

Plays for Strolling Mummers

OLD GASTRIC JUICE. Oh, ho-ho-ho-ho! Ha! Ha! You have found love very soon. [*They pay no attention to him, but look at each other steadily.*] Ha! Ha! Ha! Then I shall have to spray the potato again.

[*He moves toward her.*]

POTATO. [*Running left in terror.*] Oh! Oh! No! No! Oh-h. . . .

[OLD GASTRIC JUICE captures her at left and sprays her again. She moans and groans and seems to wilt. OLD GASTRIC JUICE leaves her and returns to YOUNG GASTRIC JUICE and CELERY.]

OLD GASTRIC JUICE. What! Still looking into each other's eyes! She doesn't love you, my boy. She only pretends to so we won't spray her with our acids.

YOUNG GASTRIC JUICE. [*Without taking his eyes from CELERY, questioningly.*] You—?

CELERY. I love you!

OLD GASTRIC JUICE. [*Center; skeptically.*] Ha-ha!

[YOUNG GASTRIC JUICE leads CELERY tenderly to his couch at right. There they sit, looking into each other's eyes.]

YOUNG GASTRIC JUICE. You are very beautiful.

CELERY. Your eyes are flames that burn a warmth into me.

YOUNG GASTRIC JUICE. You are like a white rose petal.

CELERY. The moment I saw you my fibers trembled with joy.

YOUNG GASTRIC JUICE. Your lips are like cherries with dew on them. I love you.

CELERY. I love you.

[*They kiss.* OLD GASTRIC JUICE has gone left to BAKED POTATO, who still moans. He sprays her again and she groans louder than ever. He stands there, looking at the love-making of

Inside Stuff

YOUNG GASTRIC JUICE *and* CELERY *and adds his laugh to the lamentations of* BAKED POTATO.]

YOUNG GASTRIC JUICE. I will love you for ever and ever!

CELERY. I will love you for ever and ever!

OLD GASTRIC JUICE. Ha-ha-ha!

[*There is another arrival by way of the chute.*

SMALL STEAK *slides down, falls heavily, and gets up aggressively. The lovers pay no attention to him.*]

STEAK. What the hell is this?

OLD GASTRIC JUICE. [*Going to him.*] Merely a place for small steaks like you to come and rest awhile.

[*He sprays him. No effect is noticeable.*]

STEAK. What's the idea?

OLD GASTRIC JUICE. I am preparing you for the Digestive Tubes.

STEAK. Huh! You can't hurt me! [*Roaring.*] I'm tough!

OLD GASTRIC JUICE. Most of you are. Especially those of you this man eats. [*He sprays him again.*] There! Did you feel that?

STEAK. The prick of a pin!

OLD GASTRIC JUICE. [*To YOUNG GASTRIC JUICE.*] My boy, we've received another shipment of— [*Looks doubtfully at SMALL STEAK.*] steak. Stop your love-making. I need your help.

YOUNG GASTRIC JUICE. [*Looking at CELERY.*] Dearest, I must leave you for a moment.

[*Their gaze lingering even as he leaves her, he goes left, and with OLD GASTRIC, sprays SMALL STEAK.*]

STEAK. Ha! You can't hurt me! I'm tough!

OLD GASTRIC JUICE. We'll see. We'll see. [*To YOUNG GASTRIC JUICE.*] The potato is ready.

Plays for Strolling Mummers

[*They go to BAKED POTATO, spray her through her moans, and then take her to the Entrance to the Digestive Tubes at rear, right. Here she balks and groans loudly, but they spray her once more, open the door, and thrust her in. She gives a cry which is cut off with the closing of the door. YOUNG GASTRIC JUICE returns quickly to CELERY, while OLD GASTRIC JUICE goes to SMALL STEAK.*]

STEAK. [*Who has watched the proceedings.*] Do you think you're going to put *me* in there?

OLD GASTRIC JUICE. [*Spraying him.*] Shortly. Shortly.

STEAK. Ha! I'm tough! (OLD GASTRIC JUICE *sprays him again and this seems to be felt.*) Sa-ay, lay off that!

YOUNG GASTRIC JUICE. I wondered what love was like, and now I know.

CELERY. You are like crisp brown leaves in autumn. I want to lie in your arms.

YOUNG GASTRIC JUICE. [*Taking her in his arms.*] You are like a warm rain that falls upon my face.

CELERY. I am very happy, and very tired.

YOUNG GASTRIC JUICE. Then you must rest. Lie here and rest and I will cover you with a robe of gold. [*He gets up; she lies on the couch and he covers her.*] I have work to do, but when I am through, I shall lie beside you. [*He bends and kisses her.*] I love you.

CELERY. I love you.

[*He gazes at her. She sleeps. Something slides down the chute, and he turns. It is SLICE OF BREAD. SLICE OF BREAD is a thin, timid girl, frightened and awed by this strange place. She gets to her feet and looks about bewilderedly.*]

Inside Stuff

BREAD. Oh! Where am I?

[*Without taking the trouble to answer, OLD GASTRIC JUICE sprays her.*]

BREAD. Oh! Oh! What are you doing to me?

[*He sprays her again and she cries out in pain.*]

STEAK. [*Manfully to the rescue.*] That's a fine way to treat a young girl! You— [OLD GASTRIC JUICE sprays him and it seems now to take effect.] Sa-ay!

OLD GASTRIC JUICE. [*Spraying BREAD again.*] A little more.

YOUNG GASTRIC JUICE. [*Spraying her. She cries out again and wilts.*] She's ready.

[*They take her to the Entrance to the Digestive Tubes and thrust her in. She gives a frightened chirp as she disappears into the blackness. As she does so, two new members arrive down the chute and fall in a heap together on the floor. They are SLICE OF CUCUMBER, a tall, skinny, disagreeable man, and GLASS OF MILK, his wife, a short, squat, disagreeable woman.*]

MILK. [*As they extricate themselves.*] Get off my leg!

CUCUMBER. Stop kicking my ribs!

MILK. [*On her feet, glaring at him.*] I wasn't kicking your skinny ribs!

CUCUMBER. I wasn't sitting on your fat leg!

MILK. My leg isn't fat!

CUCUMBER. My ribs aren't skinny!

MILK. They are!

CUCUMBER. They aren't!

YOUNG GASTRIC JUICE. [*Going to them and spraying each of them.*] Stop that noise! Stop, do you hear?

MILK. Don't do that!

Plays for Strolling Mummers

CUCUMBER. Ouch!

MILK. Why should we stop our noise?

YOUNG GASTRIC JUICE. Because you will wake her.

[*He goes to CELERY on the couch and stands looking at her in sleep, entranced.* OLD GASTRIC JUICE goes to the two newcomers and sprays both of them.]

MILK. Don't do that!

CUCUMBER. Ouch!

MILK. I don't like this place.

CUCUMBER. He hurt me.

MILK. I'm glad he did.

CUCUMBER. I hate you!

MILK. Oh, you don't love me any more? Why did you marry me?

CUCUMBER. Because I loved you.

MILK. Why don't you love me now?

CUCUMBER. Because I married you.

MILK. How I hate you! You with your skinny ribs!

CUCUMBER. I hate you—you with your fat legs!

MILK. My legs aren't fat!

CUCUMBER. They are!

MILK. They aren't! Skinny ribs!

CUCUMBER. My ribs aren't skinny!

MILK. They are—!

YOUNG GASTRIC JUICE. [*Going to them again.* Stop! [*He sprays both of them, and is joined by OLD GASTRIC JUICE.*] We can't have any more of this!

[*They both spray the arguing married couple and steer them to the Entrance to the Digestive Tubes.*]

CUCUMBER. They aren't! Ouch!

MILK. Don't do that! They are!

CUCUMBER. Ouch! They aren't!

MILK. They are! Don't do that. . . .

Inside Stuff

[They disappear into the Entrance to the Digestive Tubes, still in hot argument.]

STEAK. *[Coming forward again.]* You'll never put me in there—I'm tough! *[YOUNG GASTRIC JUICE attempts to spray him, STEAK evades him but is caught by a full spray from the atomizer of OLD GASTRIC JUICE.]* Hey! *[He runs to one side.]* That stuff stings, like pepper. *[Regaining his courage.]* But I tell you I'm tough!

[Some soft, round green objects, like stuffed balloons begin to roll down the chute, one after the other.]

OLD GASTRIC JUICE. A bunch of grapes, my boy. We'll do it first and then finish him.

STEAK. No, you won't! I'm tough!

[The grapes are followed down the chute by the grape-stem, with two or three grapes still clinging to it. BUNCH OF GRAPES is a withered, worried old man.]

GRAPES. Oh, my beauties! My beauties! Where are you? Where—? They're taking you away from me. *[He begins to scuttle about, gathering his grapes and fastening them upon himself again. YOUNG GASTRIC JUICE has gone again to his couch at right, where he stands, looking down upon the sleeping beauty of CELERY.]* There! My beauties. . . . *[OLD GASTRIC JUICE sprays him.]* Oh! You stabbed me! I'm an old man, sir, you—my beauties. . . . *[OLD GASTRIC JUICE has sprayed him again and the grapes, one by one, slowly begin to shrivel and dry up.]* You're doing something to them, hurting them—my beauties. . . .

[GRAPE'S words are reduced to a low mumbling whine as he shrinks into a dried thing under the spray of OLD GASTRIC JUICE. OLD GASTRIC

Plays for Strolling Mummers

JUICE now leads him to the Entrance to the Digestive Tubes at rear and gently puts him in.]

STEAK. [*Glaring in rage and muttering to himself, he strides toward OLD GASTRIC JUICE, who has his back to him, as if to do a lot of damage.*] Ha-a! You won't put me in there! I'm— [OLD GASTRIC JUICE turns about and sprays STEAK just as he reaches him. STEAK recoils, wounded.] Ow!

OLD GASTRIC JUICE. [*To YOUNG GASTRIC JUICE.*] Come, my boy, let's be done with this tough gentleman. One more spray or two—

[*He sprays STEAK again, who then runs out of harm's way. YOUNG GASTRIC JUICE joins OLD GASTRIC JUICE in the pursuit; they corner him and spray him plentifully.*]

STEAK. I tell you I'm tough! Oh! Oh! Oh! Oh-h. . . . I'm still—tough. Oh-h-h. . . .

[*STEAK remains rather tough, but he is beaten, and they lead him, still fighting, to the Entrance to the Digestive Tubes*]

STEAK. [*Making a last stand.*] I'm tough! I won't—go in—there. Oh! Oh-ha-aa. . . . [*They thrust him, still spraying, into the entrance. He gives a final roar.*] I'll raise hell in here!

[*He is gone. The two GASTRIC JUICES return down.*]

YOUNG GASTRIC JUICE. That's all.

OLD GASTRIC JUICE. [*Looking up the chute.*] I think so. There may be more.

YOUNG GASTRIC JUICE. [*Going right.*] My beloved!

OLD GASTRIC JUICE. [*Turning to him.*] My boy!

YOUNG GASTRIC JUICE. What?

OLD GASTRIC JUICE. Let us—while she sleeps—spray her, too.

YOUNG GASTRIC JUICE. No!

Inside Stuff

OLD GASTRIC JUICE. It will be better.

YOUNG GASTRIC JUICE. I love her!

OLD GASTRIC JUICE. She does not love you.

YOUNG GASTRIC JUICE. She does love me.

OLD GASTRIC JUICE. I know that she does not.

[While they speak, another person, unseen by them, slides softly down the chute and lands lightly on his feet. It is BONBON. BONBON is a beautiful young man with pale gold hair. He is clad in a wondrous hue of lavender, which clings closely to his lithe form. He looks about, sees the two GASTRIC JUICES conversing at center, and then discovers CELERY on the couch at right. CELERY stirs, awakens, and raises herself on one elbow. The first thing she sees is BONBON. They stare at each other in the same manner she and YOUNG GASTRIC JUICE had stared at each other.]

YOUNG GASTRIC JUICE. Don't you think I can tell from looking into her eyes?

OLD GASTRIC JUICE. No.

YOUNG GASTRIC JUICE. From touching her hand?

OLD GASTRIC JUICE. No.

YOUNG GASTRIC JUICE. From kissing her lips?

OLD GASTRIC JUICE. No.

YOUNG GASTRIC JUICE. How do you know such things?

OLD GASTRIC JUICE. I know that she is not your kind. I, too, have loved some of the things that have been sent down in the places where I worked, beautiful bits of food from the outside world. But they are not our kind, and we can love only our kind, as she can love only hers. Anything else is false.

YOUNG GASTRIC JUICE. Well, we are different. We

Plays for Strolling Mummers

are alike, exactly alike. [*He turns to CELERY.*] My love. . . .

[He sees her, raised on one elbow, gazing rapturously at something behind him, and stops. He looks to see what it is at which CELERY is looking, and with a start, discovers BONBON. As he stares, BONBON goes to CELERY and kneels by her.]

BONBON. You are very beautiful.

CELERY. Your eyes are flames that burn a warmth into me.

BONBON. You are like a white rose petal.

CELERY. The moment I saw you my fibers trembled with joy.

BONBON. Your lips are like cherries with dew on them. I love you.

CELERY. I love you.

[They kiss.]

YOUNG GASTRIC JUICE. Wait! [*BONBON leaps up, CELERY starts to her feet, and they stand, clinging to each other, looking at YOUNG GASTRIC JUICE. To CELERY.*] You don't love me?

CELERY. I think you are very nice.

YOUNG GASTRIC JUICE. You love him?

[She does not answer, but turns to BONBON's eyes, and they stare at each other.]

YOUNG GASTRIC JUICE. Oh! Do you know that if it is he you love, and not me, that you cannot stay here?

CELERY. [*Staring into BONBON's eyes.*] Yes.

YOUNG GASTRIC JUICE. That you will have to go—in there?

CELERY. Yes.

YOUNG GASTRIC JUICE. Then you would rather go

Inside Stuff

to death with him than stay with me and live?

CELERY. Yes.

YOUNG GASTRIC JUICE. [*With a cry.*] Ah! If this is love then give me something worse than pain!

[*He stands, in grief.*]

CELERY. [*To BONBON.*] Come. Let us go.

[*Together they go rear to the Entrance to the Digestive Tubes and there, without hesitating, go in.*]

OLD GASTRIC JUICE. My boy, I am age and you are youth. I gave you advice, but like youth, you refused to take it. You had to find experience for yourself.

YOUNG GASTRIC JUICE. I found it.

OLD GASTRIC JUICE. Perhaps it is best.

YOUNG GASTRIC JUICE. I hate her!

OLD GASTRIC JUICE. I once said the same thing.

YOUNG GASTRIC JUICE. I love her!

OLD GASTRIC JUICE. I said that, too.

YOUNG GASTRIC JUICE. I hate her!

OLD GASTRIC JUICE. Well, the only thing we can decide about it is that we're through work for the day. Nothing to do until breakfast. I hope he doesn't have eggs again.

YOUNG GASTRIC JUICE. [*Throwing himself despondently upon his couch at right.*] It doesn't matter! Nothing matters!

[*The place is beginning slowly to get dark and continues to do so until a shadowy, waxlike hue suffuses it. OLD GASTRIC JUICE goes to his couch and proceeds to go to bed.*]

OLD GASTRIC JUICE. Oh-ho! Another day gone.

YOUNG GASTRIC JUICE. She is gone!

OLD GASTRIC JUICE. I wonder how long I'll have to work here.

Plays for Strolling Mummers

YOUNG GASTRIC JUICE. I'll never fall in love again, old man.

OLD GASTRIC JUICE. I've been here fifty-four years now. He can't last much longer. . . .

YOUNG GASTRIC JUICE. I was a fool to tell her all those things.

OLD GASTRIC JUICE. The last fellow I worked in only lived twenty-six years. You don't always have that luck. . . .

YOUNG GASTRIC JUICE. Old man!

OLD GASTRIC JUICE. [*Half asleep.*] What is it?

YOUNG GASTRIC JUICE. [*Terribly.*] As long as I live, I'll never fall in love again. I'll hate women to my dying day. Do you hear? I'll hate them, and I'll never fall in love again!

OLD GASTRIC JUICE. Uh. That's good.

YOUNG GASTRIC JUICE. Never! Never! [*There is a short silence. Both seem to doze into sleep, but in a moment YOUNG GASTRIC JUICE raises himself up and calls.*] Old man!

OLD GASTRIC JUICE. [*Sleepily.*] Yes, uh. . . .

YOUNG GASTRIC JUICE. Maybe there'll be some more celery to-morrow night.

OLD GASTRIC JUICE. Uh. . . .

THE CURTAIN FALLS



HARLEQUIN. *Merci beaucoup, messieurs et madames.*
You are too kind.

The tragedies of youth are the comedies of old age. You, each of you, when young, knew the delightful torments of first love. They were very real to you and you would have been offended to have been told there was a laugh in them, yet to-day, if you have reached that delightful age where it is possible to reminisce without recalling some unfinished task, you will get a hearty laugh out of the peccadillos of your early years.

The next play will be about a young couple in the first throes of love and will be called "Great Moments."

[HARLEQUIN *bows and the curtains close.*]

GREAT MOMENTS

A Juvenile Comedy

BY RAYMOND MOORE

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GREAT MOMENTS *

CHARACTERS

CELESTE

HAROLD

HE (Reggie)

SHE (Milly)

SCENE: *The gardens of a summer hotel of the better type. A path with bench to right and one to left, and a rose garden behind. Hedges on either side. CELESTE, a young woman of twenty-five, stands before the bench to left, while HAROLD, her fiancé, stands beside her holding her hands. Both are radiant with happiness, and one might suspect that they had been embracing.*

CELESTE. [*With finality.*] Well, of course this is all very nice, but you must find Milly. There's no telling what she's doing. If the child's left alone a minute she's off after the men, and usually flirting with every one she sees.

HAROLD. I guess it's the Japanese parasol that did it this time.

CELESTE. Yes, men do fall for such things.

HAROLD. [*Moving over to other bench.*] Well, I

* "Great Moments" was first produced by the Wharf Players, at Provincetown, Mass., July 28, 1924.

Plays for Strolling Mummers

suppose I must find her. But hunting lost sisters isn't the most thrilling thing an engaged man can do. And the reward?

CELESTE. [*Moving over to him and pretending for a moment that she is going to kiss him.*] The reward comes after you find her.

HAROLD. [*Resigned to his fate.*] All right, dear. I suppose so.

[HAROLD exits right. She seats herself at left and begins to read as REGGIE, the boy, passes. He is intrigued with her at once, sits upon the bench opposite, and watches her eagerly—first hopefully, then with lessening courage as she reads, and reads in spite of the gentle noises that rack his throat from time to time. A refreshing bit of femininity under a Japanese parasol passes behind CELESTE, recognizes her with a start, and then carefully tiptoes by. She stops with a pleasant smile of surprise as she sees REGGIE trying to attract CELESTE'S attention. She holds her finger to her lips in thought. He is decidedly worth while, and she moves off to one side and stands there listening. REGGIE notices a small stick on the ground, drags it to him with his foot, and picks it up. A bright thought. He hesitates, then tosses the stick in the air and it lands at CELESTE'S feet.]

CELESTE. [*Startled.*] Oh!

HE. [*Helpfully.*] The trees seem to be dropping.

[MILLY is surprised and giggles, but it is a girlish laugh full of admiration.]

CELESTE. [*Noticing him for the first time.*] I beg pardon?

HE. [*Confidentially.*] I say the limbs are falling.

[MILLY sighs romantically.]

Great Moments

CELESTE. [*Noncommittally.*] Yes.

[*Returns to her reading.*]

HE. [*Hopefully.*] The trees seem to be dropping their limbs.

[*MILLY looks at him longingly.*]

CELESTE. [*Looking up for a moment.*] Oh—yes.

[*Returns to reading.*]

HE. [*Hopefully.*] They rather startle one sometimes.

CELESTE. [*With more than a trace of annoyance.*] I beg pardon?

HE. [*Shouting in his excitement.*] I say the limbs falling from the trees rather startle one sometimes.

[*MILLY wets her lips feverishly; she is about to melt with adoration.*]

CELESTE. Oh, yes. I suppose so.

[*She settles down comfortably to read—if she can. HE watches her with growing alarm, then holds out his hand in sudden inspiration.*]

HE. I thought I felt some rain.

CELESTE. [*In some surprise.*] I beg pardon?

HE. [*Floundering.*] I said I thoughter thoughter thoughter felt some rain.

[*She is amused in spite of herself, and puts the book aside to give her full attention to him.*]

[*HE responds with visible relief and a sigh.*]

CELESTE. [*Graciously.*] Oh, did you? When?

HE. Why, just now.

CELESTE. Oh, I see. I guess I was reading. I thought you might have meant yesterday or last week.

HE. Oh, no! No, I wasn't here yesterday. We just came over this morning. Dad and mother and me. Came over from New York. [*An afterthought.*] And my little sister.

CELESTE. Oh, did you?

Plays for Strolling Mummers

HE. [*Confidentially.*] Yes. And I like it here. I like it very much. [*Smiling sweetly.*] And now I think I'm gonner like it a lot more. [*Moves over to her bench, starts to sit and draws himself up each time, then sits very suddenly, and smiles.*] Haven't you noticed lots of interesting people about?

[*MILLY prides herself as one of them.*]

CELESTE. I hadn't, but now that you have called my attention to it I'm *beginning* to notice them.

HE. I have. Never been in quite such a nice place before. [*He moves a little closer, and MILLY shows her distress.*] I think I'm gonner like it here now—an awful lot. Do you stay here?

CELESTE. Off and on.

HE. Do you like it here?

CELESTE. [*With great seriousness.*] Well, yes—and no.

HE. [*Dubiously.*] Oh, I see. [*A sudden light.*] Sometimes you do and sometimes you don't.

CELESTE. [*With finality.*] That's it exactly.

HE. Is it the weather?

CELESTE. Yes, sometimes.

HE. [*Puzzled.*] Oh. [*Hopefully.*] The weather does spoil things sometimes, doesn't it?

CELESTE. [*Rising in sudden abandonment.*] Yes, but what does the weather matter when we are young?

[*She starts in MILLY's direction, and MILLY dashes behind the hedge.*]

HE. [*Carried away, and following her.*] Yes, what does the weather matter when we are young! [*MILLY comes from behind near end of hedge, crosses in front of benches and disappears behind opposite hedge; REGGIE following CELESTE and rubbing his hands enthusiastically together.*] Gee, I didn't know anybody else ever felt that way.

Great Moments

CELESTE. [*Coldly again.*] I beg pardon?

[*Seats herself.*]

HE. [*Lamely.*] I say—I say—gee! I mean I didn't know anybody else ever felt the way—way we feel.

CELESTE. [*Suspiciously.*] *We feel?*

HE. [*Meekly.*] About the weather.

[*Sits beside her.*]

CELESTE. [*Laughing.*] Oh, I see. I didn't quite understand you.

HE. [*Thoroughly nettled.*] No, I see you didn't. [*Rises and walks away in disgust, his hands in his pockets.*] I thought you were goner, and then you didn't. That's always the way though. You women never understand us men, darn it!

[*MILLY peers out from behind the hedge.*]

CELESTE. [*Sweetly.*] Oh, I'm so sorry. But it's useless for women to try to understand men—in the mass, don't you think? [*MILLY pokes her head out and gives an utterly disguised look at CELESTE, then laughs in a very superior way; retires behind the hedge.*] Why, a poor woman is lucky if she can understand one man, much less the whole mass of masculine humanity. [*With deadly sweetness.*] I'd be content to understand just *one* of them. [*HE sweeps to her and sits very suddenly, almost missing the end of the bench, but recovering himself and regarding her with a soul-searching gaze.*] I think—

[*MILLY appears and looks about to murder*

CELESTE.]

HE. [*With enthusiasm.*] Would you really? Could you really be content in understanding just *one* man? A woman of your calibre and only *one* man?

[*MILLY has her arms akimbo and her foot expresses a good deal.*]

Plays for Strolling Mummers

CELESTE. Why, of course. If I could find an interesting—

HE. [*Sighing with relief, his troubles solved.*] Oh!

CELESTE. [*Coldly.*] I beg pardon?

HE. [*Annoyed.*] I wish you wouldn't beg pardon me. It gets me all upset.

CELESTE. Oh, I see. I shall try to remember.

HE. [*Rising awkwardly and confusedly; backing toward MILLY.*] Now you *have* wrecked my train of thought.

[*MILLY becomes alarmed that she will be discovered, and decides to leave; blows him a fond kiss as she does so, raises her parasol and strolls away.*]

CELESTE. I'm so sorry. I take it that you are not traveling alone?

HE. Oh, no. Mother and dad are here. I told you *that* when we first knew each other. And I have to be careful. [*Pause.*] Sis is here, too. [*Confidentially.*] She's an awful bore. She's younger than I am.

CELESTE. I don't think I've seen any of them. Have your parents been around?

HE. Been around?

CELESTE. Yes. Have they been out—by here—for instance?

HE. Oh, goodness, no! Not with me sitting here. But it's all right. They won't notice me for a few days yet. They think I don't know any one here yet. But they watch me because usually they don't like my friends. They always rest up the first few days after they get to a hotel. Think it's stylish, I guess. Mother likes to be fatigued after a journey—take the baths and that sorter thing. [*With tender solicitude.*] Did you come here to bathe?

Great Moments

CELESTE. Oh, no! [*Roguishly, with a motion of her hand indicating the garden.*] Not here.

HE. Well, naturally I didn't mean right here. My goodness, madam. [*Pause.*] Have your parents been out much?

CELESTE. Oh, no. My parents are at home.

HE. At home! And they let you go around by yourself!

CELESTE. Oh, yes.

HE. [*Suspiciously.*] You *have* parents, of course?

CELESTE. I beg pardon!

HE. I mean—you have proper parents? [*Confused.*] You see mother always taught me to find out about my friends' parents. We're kinder particular in our family, and she doesn't like me to go around with any and everybody, and then, of course I like to be careful on my own account. [*Seeing that he has wounded her.*] You're all right though. I can tell. I can tell a girl's parents the minute I see her.

CELESTE. You can?

HE. [*Modestly.*] Yes. [*Gets up in his excitement.*] I guess it's from observation. Observation of human nature. That's what I'm interested in. I like to get to know people—lots of them. And you can learn a lot if you do. You oughter try. And it's more fun sometimes.

CELESTE. [*Meaningly.*] Yes, isn't it! But do you really think a girl's parents are important?

HE. Well, of course—she has to have—

CELESTE. [*Laughing.*] No, no, not that. Do you think that when a man cares for a woman—say for instance, if a wonderful man like yourself [*HE smiles proudly*] were interested in a noble girl—like myself for instance—that you would care who her parents

Plays for Strolling Mummers

were? You wouldn't, would you? You'd love her for herself. I know you would. In this day and generation a man loves a girl for her own worth.

HE. [*Enraptured, sweeping to the bench.*] Gee, you're a wonderful woman! You think more than any woman I've ever known. [*Enthusiastically.*] You know, I think we could get along swell. [*Even CELESTE is surprised at this.*] About how old are you?

CELESTE. Oh—about how old am I?

HE. Yes, how old are you?

CELESTE. Do you think we've known each other long enough to be discussing each other's ages?

HE. Plenty. That's the first thing a man always asks a girl. And besides, how can I tell? Maybe you aren't the right age for me, and I can't be interested in a woman that's old enough to be my mother. [*CELESTE starts.*] Or in one that's as young [*with great disgust*] as my sister. I've got to have one my own age.

CELESTE. Oh, I see! But don't you think a woman older than yourself might do?

HE. Well, maybe. Gimme a sense of balance, I suppose, and make me take a family seriously. But I don't know. [*Confidentially.*] I think maybe I'd like one more my own age. You can do more with them.

CELESTE. Yes, a man should always marry a woman he can manage.

HE. That's just my idea, too. [*Enthusiastically.*] Gee, we'd get along fine. You know the more I know you the better I like you. [*Pause.*] Did you ever think of getting married?

CELESTE. [*Modestly.*] Well, a gentleman spoke of it to me once—and then mother used to mention it when I was a child.

Great Moments

HE. [*Approvingly.*] I see your mother has brought you upright [*one word.*] I knew you had proper parents. You see, we *could* get along fine.

CELESTE. But I'm not so sure. You see, I've always had my own way.

HE. [*Rising and moving off; this is his first real oration: all his life's reading, experience, and hearsay.*] Oh, you'd get over that. All women are that way.

[HAROLD appears on the scene; he sees REGGIE with surprise and soon can scarcely believe his senses; he stands listening, more and more surprised, puzzled, and finally disgusted.]

HE. [*Continuing.*] All women are the same. You girls grow up free and independent and thinking—and when you get married you forget you've got to stop all that, remembering that you've married a husband—one man for good and all, and you've got to help him make his life out of something, that is, I mean, something out of his life. A woman's rôle is sacrifice and devotion and gratitude—yes, gratitude, for all that the men do for you. [HAROLD laughs. REGGIE approaches CELESTE more closely.] And my wife would have to be all that, and—[*confused*] maybe some other things I can't think of right now. I just can't remember them all when I get to talking to a real live woman. I'll think of them to-night—in bed. And I'll let you know in the morning when I see you. [*Bravely.*] Do you think we could get along fine if you'd be willing to give in? Do you think you could lead a life of sacrifice and wifely duty and devotion? [CELESTE leans forward as if to accept; HE hastily.] Oh, don't misunderstand me. I'm not proposing yet. I'm not stating anything definite. I know women. [HAROLD raises his eyebrows.] I'm just asking how you would feel if I did propose. I've lived too long

Plays for Strolling Mummers

to be indiscreet—right at first, that is—and have a lawsuit maybe or something. I just wanted you to know what kind of man I would be if I did propose, so you could figure whether you would suit. And then there are some other things that I would have to investigate.

CELESTE. Don't you think you have about covered the case already?

HE. [*Delicately.*] No. Do you—do you love children? How many children do you think you could love?

[*HAROLD throws up his hands in horror and departs.*]

CELESTE. What!

HE. I mean—if you were *adopting* a family, how many would you adopt?

CELESTE. [*Amused.*] Oh, I see. That's different. [*Laughs and coughs behind her hand.*] Quite different. Well, a dozen I guess. I just love children!

HE. [*In some alarm.*] But I mean—how many would you adopt if your husband [*drawing it out*] had a small income and was all tired out in the evenings and you had a small house and did all the housework, and the sink got clogged up—

[*His voice hoarse with emotion.*]

CELESTE. [*Smiling mischievously.*] Oh, if the sink got clogged up I suppose I couldn't have so many. Perhaps only three.

HE. [*In glee.*] Three! Gee, just the number I was thinking about! What ages would you want?

CELESTE. Oh, about six and eight and twelve.

HE. [*Disappointedly.*] Aw, now! [*Persuasively.*] A year apart. So they could play together.

[*HAROLD reappears.*]

HAROLD. [*Rather sharply.*] Celeste! I can't find

Great Moments

her anywhere. [*Slightly indignant at CELESTE.*] She's about as elusive and flirtatious as her sister.

CELESTE. Oh, is that you? Well, we must find her. [*Rising and going to HAROLD; REGGIE sits there stunned.*] I'll go with you. [*To the boy.*] You'll pardon me, won't you? My sister—about your age—is lost too. [*She laughs, but not unkindly.*] It was so pleasant to meet you. But I must be going now. I hope I shall see you again?

HE. [*Who has risen in confusion; then sensing the situation.*] Oh—er—er I didn't know you had a . . . Is he—is he—he isn't your husband I hope?

[*With alarm in his voice*]

CELESTE. [*Laughing.*] Oh, no. Not yet, anyway.

[*Looking lovingly at HAROLD.*]

HAROLD. [*Mischievously.*] But going to be soon, sonny!

[*He kisses her.*]

HE. [*Very coldly to CELESTE, holding on tight.*] I didn't quite understand your condition. [*Frigidly.*] And if you have parents they are not proper at all!

[*His voice breaks.*]

[CELESTE and HAROLD laugh and walk away. He wilts when the necessity for a brave front is no longer there, and is on the limbo of a sob when another bit of femininity appears. She is young, very young in fact, and seems at once to be the woman of his dreams. It is MILLY of the Japanese parasol. She enters and sits on the bench opposite him. HE watches her for a moment as she juggles the parasol to advantage. HE smiles contentedly, then glances at the stick on the ground and smiles again. She, too, has seen its possibilities. Both look innocently away into dreamy space and a leg and a parasol

Plays for Strolling Mummers

advance upon the stick. The parasol reaches it first and draws it in while the leg scrapes fruitlessly over the grass. A very blank look passes over his face as he fails to find the stick. HE looks down and his eyes grow wide with astonishment. Just then the stick lands at his feet. HE gives a violent start and shoots a glance in her direction.]

SHE. [*Sweetly.*] The trees seem to be dropping.

HE. [*His eyes darting out of his head and back again.*] What!!!

SHE. [*Soothingly, even more sweetly.*] The trees seem to be dropping their limbs.

[*HE turns and glares at her, then turns away and freezes. This is probably an improper woman, something he has long heard about, and now he is face to face with her.*]

SHE. [*Gently.*] They rather startle one sometimes.

[*HE glares at her, then tilts his nose.*]

SHE. [*Very firmly.*] I say the limbs falling from the trees rather startle one sometimes.

[*His head and neck are adamantine, but his eyes express all shades of wonder, surprise, fear, and anger.*]

SHE. [*With hardening perseverance.*] They-frighten-me-so-much-whenever-they-drop.

[*HE is statuesque, his nose ascending. SHE is annoyed and pauses to consider a plan of further attack. An idea. SHE smiles.*]

SHE. I'm so glad you men [*HE shoots a glance at her and almost smiles*] don't get scared the way girls do at trees falling. . . .

[*HE seems to be weakening, then remembers his mother's care and freezes again.*]

SHE. [*Encouraged.*] I'm so glad you big strong

Great Moments

men don't get scared the way girls do at trees falling—and mice and rats.

[HE *melts at last, and really smiles. SHE is so thankful and smiles too.*]

HE. Oh, they're nothing at all—nothing at all. I'm very fond of them in fact. [*Philosophically.*] And then, well, men have to have nerve so they can protect the race.

SHE. [*Agreeing.*] Uh-huh. And so do women so they can have them.

HE. [*Insecurely.*] Have them?

SHE. [*With assurance.*] The race.

[SHE *isn't trying to be smart but to show him, after overhearing his conversation with CELESTE, that she, too, is a modern spirit. In fact, not at all old-fashioned like her sister—dear, goodness, no!—but a woman after his own heart, one with whom he can commune in perfect understanding.*]

HE. [*Frightened at this woman.*] I beg pardon?

SHE. [*Slowly and measuredly.*] I-say-women-have to have-more-nerve-than-men so they can—

HE. [*Shuddering in alarm and confusion.*] Yes. yes. Don't mention it! I—I don't know. I suppose so. [*Hastily explaining with his hand.*] You see it isn't in my line.

SHE. No, but you ought to think about it. All men ought to think about it.

HE. [*Becoming indignant and unable to cope with her.*] I beg pardon?

SHE. [*Sighing frankly.*] I guess I'm not beginning very well. [*Remembering his conversation.*] I thought I felt some rain.

HE. [*Shortly.*] I didn't.

SHE. Oh, I meant a little while ago.

Plays for Strolling Mummers

HE. [*More indignantly still.*] It hasn't rained all day!

SHE. I know. But I thought I'd say it anyhow. I always say, "I thought I felt some rain" when I don't know what else to say.

HE. [*Wonderingly.*] Oh.

SHE. It helps sometimes.

HE. [*Weakening; she really is irresistible.*] Do—do you say that, too?

SHE. Oh, yes, *always* when I have a gap in my conversation.

HE. [*Getting in form; SHE may not be so bad after all.*] Gee, isn't that funny? I have gaps, too. [*Laughs.*] We both have gaps! Sometimes I just can't think what to say to a new girl. And mother always said never to talk about the weather—not even to anybody you just meet. [*Indicating the casualness of it all with a wave of his hand.*] Of course, she really doesn't know I just *happen to meet* people sometimes—so I always say to them, "I thought I felt some rain," and you can tell an awful lot about them *after* you've said it to them. It's like a social thermometer. Some of them get warmer and some get colder. And then it doesn't sound monotonous like the weather in general, so I always use it whenever I have a bad gap. But I didn't know anybody else ever did.

SHE. Oh, I always do—ever since—*since this afternoon.*

[*SHE looks at him adoringly with trembling lips, upper and lower.*]

HE. [*Meditatively romantic.*] We *do* seem to have a lot in common, don't we?

[*An infinitude of gentleness has crept into his voice.*]

Great Moments

SHE. [*Moving over to his bench and sitting beside him.*] Oh, I'm sure we have.

[*SHE moves closer.*]

HE. [*Worried, and moving down the bench.*] Ye—es, but I think we'd better find out gradually. I like to take lots of time to a thing of this sort.

SHE. Oh, pshaw!

HE. [*Moving still further away.*] I beg pardon?

SHE. [*Exasperated.*] I wish you wouldn't beg pardon me. It gets me all upset!

[*HE jumps up as if shot, glares at her, perfectly furious.*]

HE. What!! You seem to say everything I say! [*Crossing to other bench and back again, then approaching her menacingly, speaking through his teeth fiercely.*] You aren't one of those women snoopers, are you? You wouldn't be one of those, would you! [*In revulsion and scorn.*] You aren't like my sister? Snooping under sofas and hammocks in the dark? [*SHE shrinks from him terrified.*] You haven't been listening to anything I said—when I was—when I was having a business talk here with a lady this afternoon?

[*Her face is the picture of misery.*]

SHE. [*Beginning to sob.*] I'm always saying the wrong thing.

HE. [*A sudden light coming to him.*] I bet my sis—has my sister been telling you things? [*He doesn't doubt it for a moment: the real solution of the mystery.*] I might have known that she'd butt in.

[*HAROLD enters still searching for MILLY. Sees them, and almost collapses as he hears this.*]

HE. [*Continuing; outraged and indignant.*] I've never had a moment of free love in my life!

[*SHE is thoroughly amazed and miserable at the turn of affairs, and continues to sob. HE looks*

Plays for Strolling Mummers

at her in helpless amazement and then gets out his handkerchief to offer it to her but doesn't know quite how to go about it. HE is in despair: a woman in tears, and he hadn't even suspected such wells of tenderness.]

HE. [*Soothingly.*] It's all right though. You needn't cry any more.

[*HE is still awkward and doesn't know how to manage the situation. HE holds the back of her head with one hand and nervously and clumsily daubs her cheeks with the handkerchief in the other. It seems to help. SHE sobs less rackingly.*]

HE. [*Continuing.*] I s'pose a feller can't help his sister. And a strange girl can't help being told things.

[*SHE begins afresh, and HE daubs harder than ever, then speaks desolately.*]

HE. [*Continuing.*] It's awful for a man when a woman cries. We feel such brutes.

[*SHE smiles wanly, borrows the handkerchief from him, seriously blows her nose, and hands it back—the handkerchief—to him. SHE gets up, walks over to the other bench, turning her back to him. HE is left at a loss.*]

HE. [*Following part way.*] Didn't you think you felt some rain?

[*This is too much for HAROLD. He looks off in the direction from which he has come, as if contemplating getting CELESTE. He smiles wisely as he departs, giving the two a last pitying look.*]

SHE. [*Racked by the last sob; sitting.*] I think I'm beginning to—a little.

[*Smiles.*]

[*HE goes behind her bench and leans over.*]

Great Moments

HE. [*Gently.*] I think we're going to understand each other better from now on. [*Soothingly.*] I always understand people if they'll just only give me a chance.

SHE. [*Weighing his good qualities.*] You seem very sympathetic. [*HE sits beside her.*]

HE. [*Generously.*] I think we both are.

SHE. I guess we must be—or we never could have stood all we've been through. [*Sighs.*] I hope you're going to stay a long time.

HE. I hope so, too. I was a little bit scared at first. I thought maybe you weren't just all—just all that you oughter be. But I see now you're not. I could tell that by the way you cried. [*Bashfully.*] And—and I guess I appreciated it a lot. [*Modestly.*] I never had a woman really cry over me before. I hope you'll forgive me. I couldn't help it because I'm goner live to be quite old, and I have to be careful. [*A terrible afterthought.*] If my sister doesn't make me die before my time.

SHE. [*Appreciatively.*] I think I'm beginning to understand you, too.

HE. [*Feeling the communion.*] Oh, yes! More completely and *more completely.*

SHE. [*Sighing.*] I wish it could always be like this.

HE. I wish it could, too. But I don't know. I have my troubles. [*Pause.*] Got any family to bother you?

SHE. No, not much of a one. I have a sister here, but she doesn't count. She's at least twenty-five and not very active.

HE. Wish I could say that. I got three of them—family, I mean. Dad and mother and sister. Dad and mother aren't so bad. They can't go very fast. But

Plays for Strolling Mummers

that sister of mine! Well, if you weren't a lady I'd say she was a—was a— I can't say it.

SHE. [*Persuasively.*] Oh, go ahead and say it!

HE. A devil.

[*Rises in his excitement and walks away.*]

SHE. [*Understandingly.*] I know. Younger? [HE *nods despondently.*] Children can be such a nuisance.

HE. Yes, there's nothing I can tolerate less than a child interfering with my business. Always coming in at the wrong time. My sister has been a continuous embarrassment to me in the—in the great moments of my life. [*His voice breaks on "great moments."*] I think she's been present at every great moment I ever had! Of course I don't mind having her around the house—kinder nice to hear a child's voice in the home—but when I have a great moment— Well, I said it once, and I mean it. She's a devil, and a *she* one at that!

SHE. Goodness! I don't think we ever had anybody as bad as that in our family!

HE. [*Sitting; assuringly.*] Oh, good blood all right! Good blood! But just at the age of improbability. You know, the chaotic period in a child's life.

SHE. [*Insecurely.*] Yes, it's very trying.

HE. Now I remember when I was— [SHE *leans forward very eagerly to hear it and embarrasses him, or perhaps he realizes the dreadful break he is about to make; rises in confusion and walks away.*] I guess maybe I better not talk about that, though. [*Grabbing at a straw.*] How do you like the weather?

SHE. Oh, wonderful.

HE. Is—isn't it? But I wouldn't mind any kind of weather *here*.

Great Moments

SHE. Oh, wouldn't you? Why, I shouldn't like it to rain.

HE. [*Poetically.*] Oh, I don't mind the weather. Why it could rain all day when I was with you. I wouldn't care. I could sit by the fire and listen to your voice, and never care a bit about the rain coming down on the roof. I tell you, it's a big thing when a man and a woman have a lot in common. Of course it takes a lot of knowledge of human nature to get a lot in common. [*Expansively.*] Human nature's my great study. Did you ever study human nature? I mean—from the intellectual viewpoint—as well as the moral and phiz-phiz-phizological and shykic shide?

SHE. [*Enraptured, but rather amazed and awed.*] No, not from quite all those sides. Of course, I know a little about it.

HE. You oughter try. You'd learn a lot. [*Pause.*] Do you think a woman can understand more than one man?

SHE. Oh, I'm sure she could.

HE. [*With finality.*] No. She couldn't. You'll find that out in your studies later on. [*Pause.*] About how old are you?

SHE. [*Blushing and coy.*] About sixteen.

HE. [*Sits; his cup runneth over.*] Gee! Really! I didn't think I'd ever find one! I can hardly believe it. Sixteen going on seventeen?

SHE. [*Gurgling.*] Uh-huh. [*Laughs.*]

HE. [*Kindly.*] You have proper parents?

SHE. [*Without hesitation.*] Oh, yes.

HE. [*Approvingly.*] I felt they must be from the first. [*Pause.*] Do you think a woman oughter always give in to her husband?

SHE. Oh, yes!

[*HE moves a little closer.*]

Plays for Strolling Mummers

HE. [*Bravely.*] Do you like orphan aslyums?

SHE. [*In some surprise.*] Orphan asylums?

HE. Yes, orphan asylums. You know, where they give you children.

SHE. I never thought much about liking them.

HE. What I mean is—if you were getting a family—

[*HAROLD tiptoes in, followed by CELESTE. HAROLD expects to be immensely amused, and motions to CELESTE to be quiet.*]

HE. [*Continuing with difficulty.*] If you were getting a family—[*MILLY looks dreadfully embarrassed*—at an orphan aslyum of course [*absolving himself*—how many would you get?

[*CELESTE feels that she ought to interfere.*]

SHE. [*Uncertainly.*] I suppose I ought to let my husband decide.

HE. [*Continuing the catechism.*] Do you think you'd care to get three?

[*REGGIE doesn't doubt MILLY'S suitability for a moment, and his heart is about to burst with joy. CELESTE starts to speak but is restrained by HAROLD who is enjoying it immensely.*]

SHE. [*Losing her grip, but still in the race.*] Three.

HE. How old would you want them?

[*HAROLD pulls CELESTE back again.*]

SHE. I think I'd let my husband—

[*HE puts his arm further around the bench, and SHE unknowing to herself sinks into it. The world is dizzy.*]

HE. [*Recovering from the swirl.*] A year apart?

[*CELESTE makes for REGGIE but is pulled back by HAROLD.*]

SHE. [*Agreeing from habit.*] A year.

HE. So they could play together.

Great Moments

SHE. And we could play with them.

HE. [*A flash of unhappiness.*] But supposing you and me had a small income and was all tired out in the evenings and you had a small house and did all the housework and the sink got clogged up—

[*His voice is husky with emotion at such a thought.*]

SHE. I'd clean the sink.

[*His arms involuntarily close about her, and oblivion is about to descend upon them. As he kisses her the sound of CELESTE'S voice rings out indignantly.*]

CELESTE. Milly!

[*REGGIE and MILLY jump to their feet with a startled cry, and the parasol falls with a crash. There is a look of terror on his face for a moment, and then HE recognizes CELESTE.*]

HE. [*With considerable scorn for one taken un-awares.*] Oh! I thought it was my mother.

CELESTE. [*To MILLY.*] What are you doing!

MILLY. [*Mildly.*] Having a nice time.

HAROLD. I should say you were! [*To REGGIE.*] Your wife? [*Referring to MILLY.*]

HE. [*With withering scorn.*] No, not yet. [*Gives MILLY a yank to his breast and plants an uncertain kiss on her physiognomy.*] But going to be soon, sonny!

[*HE turns sharply, offers his arm to MILLY, and the two walk off with a smile of triumph. CELESTE and HAROLD watch in amazement, but not without a sense of humor—as the curtain falls.*]

THE FLIRTATION

A Pantomimic Comedy

BY FRANK FORRESTER

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THE FLIRTATION *

CHARACTERS

PIERROT, a somewhat bored husband	COLOMBINE, a low, but attractive, wench
PIERRETTE, an extremely vigilant wife	HARLEQUIN, something of a sheik

SCENE: *A small retreat in a public park. It is a place frequented by lovers, poets, and others to whom solitude and beauty are of the greatest importance. There is a bench large enough for four but which is never occupied by more than two. Behind it on a pedestal is a small bust of a laughing faun who seems to offer a mocking benediction on what transpires beneath his nose.*

TIME: *Late afternoon of the first perfect spring day.*

AT RISE: *Stage empty. PIERRETTE enters. She is a buxom lady of determined mien and indeterminate age. Her skirts are long and full, a biddy cap covers her tightly drawn-back hair. She is followed by a reluctant PIERROT.*

[*She points gleefully to the empty bench. She tells PIERROT that it is the very bench upon which they sat the day he proposed to her.*]

PIERROT stifles a yawn.

* "The Flirtation" was first produced by the Impromptu Players, in New York, December 24, 1925.

Plays for Strolling Mummers

PIERRETTE flounces upon the bench and points to a downstage seat beside her.

PIERROT obeys reluctantly.

PIERRETTE snuggles up to PIERROT.

PIERROT slightly withdraws.

PIERRETTE follows him.

PIERROT is at the end of the bench and can go no further.

PIERRETTE takes his hand in hers.

PIERROT needs it to stifle another yawn.

PIERRETTE sees the yawn and is hurt. She bustles, flounces, and moves away from her spouse. PIERRETTE pouts.

PIERROT slumps in his seat. He looks straight in front of him. He is tired of woman and her sulks.

PIERRETTE stifles a yawn.

PIERRETTE is sleepy. The fine spring air is too much for her and her eyelids flutter, then flutter, and then flatten.

PIERRETTE sleeps.

PIERRETTE snores, silently but visibly.

PIERROT is annoyed.

PIERROT recounts to himself the terrible things a husband has to endure.

COLOMBINE, an attractive wench, enters.

PIERROT is too consumed by his own sufferings and PIERRETTE's snoring to see her.

COLOMBINE sees PIERRETTE and is interested in PIERROT. Of course.

PIERROT is still concerned over the outrages he is subjected to.

COLOMBINE taps her foot silently and significantly.

PIERROT's attention, and incidentally his interest, is attracted to the wench.

PIERROT smiles at COLOMBINE. Then he looks ap-

The Flirtation

prehensively at the sleeping PIERRETTE at his side. She still sleeps. PIERROT smiles again and more confidently at COLOMBINE.

COLOMBINE pretends shyness. The wench.

PIERROT preens himself.

PIERROT places a finger over his pursed lips.

COLOMBINE suggests a stroll.

PIERROT nods his approval.

COLOMBINE points to the trees.

PIERROT signals for her to go on and that he will follow. He would.

PIERRETTE suddenly awakens. First she sees COLOMBINE who feigns indifference.

PIERRETTE turns to PIERROT and shuts his eyes with her hand.

PIERRETTE feels that she has the situation well in hand.

PIERROT signals to COLOMBINE with one hand that he is still in the game.

PIERROT opens one eye to survey the situation.

PIERRETTE is still awake.

PIERROT again signals COLOMBINE to wait for him. She will. Wouldn't you know it?

PIERRETTE sees COLOMBINE move across the scene as if continuing on her way.

PIERRETTE nods approvingly.

PIERRETTE feigns sleep.

PIERROT is not quite sure that PIERRETTE is asleep. He knows her tricks.

PIERROT signals COLOMBINE to wait for him. Gingerly he rises from his seat. He pauses for a moment and then tiptoes in the direction of COLOMBINE. He almost reaches her when PIERRETTE opens her eyes. She takes in the situation at a glance and silently flies to capture her spouse. She grabs him by the slack

Plays for Strolling Mummers

of his pants and leads him by the ear back to his seat. She pushes him into it and then reads him the riot act. PIERRETTE is thoroughly angry.

PIERRETTE threatens PIERROT with bodily injury if he attempts such a crude trick again. It was crude, you'll admit.

COLOMBINE laughingly observes the couple from behind a tree.

PIERROT looks straight in front of him.

PIERROT sees COLOMBINE and signals her to lay low.

PIERRETTE's vigilance again suffers from the spring air and she nods.

PIERRETTE nods again. Another nod.

PIERRETTE is asleep.

PIERROT signals COLOMBINE to come over to his side of the scene.

COLOMBINE gives him to understand that she is not that kind of a girl. She expects him to do the following. Isn't she feminine?

PIERROT coughs with great effect. He watches its effect upon PIERRETTE. He coughs again. PIERRETTE is sound asleep.

PIERRETTE's head sinks heavily upon her breast. Her snores cause the trees to shake.

PIERROT silently arises to his feet. He tiptoes across to COLOMBINE but with frequent glances at his frau.

COLOMBINE comes from behind the tree.

PIERROT takes off his hat and bows low but clumsily.

COLOMBINE curtsies and giggles.

COLOMBINE pulls her domino over her eyes.

PIERROT makes an effort to take her in his arms.

COLOMBINE evades him.

PIERROT again reaches out for her but COLOMBINE is youthful and full of tricks.

The Flirtation

COLOMBINE circles the trees and runs across the scene.

PIERROT follows but stumbles and turns head over heels. The lout.

COLOMBINE laughs uproariously. She hasn't had so much fun in years.

PIERROT gets to his feet and again attempts to grab her but again she eludes him.

COLOMBINE didn't know that married men could be such fun.

COLOMBINE continues to dodge about the trees followed by PIERROT. She loses her breath and stops abruptly.

PIERROT gathers her in his arms.

COLOMBINE only wanted to see what a married man would do next.

PIERROT tries to kiss her.

COLOMBINE slaps his face.

PIERROT lets her know that as a married man he is used to such abuse.

COLOMBINE finds married men great fun but unimaginative.

COLOMBINE poses PIERROT on a certain spot. She makes him close his eyes. PIERROT is a willing fool.

COLOMBINE takes her position about five feet in front of him.

PIERROT opens his eyes and sees COLOMBINE bent toward him with her lips puckered for a kiss.

PIERROT takes a step forward for the consummation.

COLOMBINE takes a step backward.

PIERROT another step forward.

COLOMBINE another step backward.

PIERROT continues to follow her step for step.

COLOMBINE backs off the scene into the trees but leaves one hand extended.

Plays for Strolling Mummers

PIERROT captures the hand.

PIERROT follows COLOMBINE out of sight. [Terrible silence. . . . More silence.]

PIERRETTE finds the silence too great for her wifely ears and subconsciously realizes that something is amiss.

PIERRETTE awakens.

PIERRETTE looks to the right and the left.

PIERRETTE grasps her umbrella and flounces about the scene. She is so furious that she fails to see HARLEQUIN enter.

HARLEQUIN looks at PIERRETTE and smothers a contemptuous smile. He looks away from her.

HARLEQUIN strolls from right to left as if awaiting an appointment. Whenever his eyes rest upon PIERRETTE it is as if she were not present.

PIERRETTE regards HARLEQUIN as a rather handsome and attractive devil.

HARLEQUIN feels the same way about himself.

HARLEQUIN pauses and ruminatively tweaks what would be a mustache had he one.

PIERRETTE surveys her clothes and thinks.

PIERRETTE recalls how COLOMBINE looked.

[First she looks at the handsome HARLEQUIN who has resumed his strutting and posturing.]

PIERRETTE studies him from all angles and finds him only for to admire.

HARLEQUIN is not insensible to the emotions he has evoked in the heart of this simple housewife but he has greater ambitions.

PIERRETTE puts her hands on her hips and looks at him longingly and lovingly.

PIERRETTE wags her head and lets the world know that she has some tricks up her sleeve.

PIERRETTE puts her tongue in her cheek and keeps HARLEQUIN between her and the audience.

The Flirtation

PIERRETTE wags a finger at HARLEQUIN.

PIERRETTE has planned her campaign.

PIERRETTE lifts her skirts revealing a pair of somewhat attractive um—ah—limbs. She tucks the hem in at her waist and gives her garb a slight panier effect. She opens her bodice at the throat and withdraws a domino. Turns back the folds of her bodice and takes off her biddy hat and uses the lace as a decoration for her folded back bodice. She loosens her hair and fluffs it about. She is beginning to look positively attractive. Look! She is attractive.

PIERRETTE places the domino over her eyes and coquettes in front of an imaginary mirror; pats her hair and then her skirts, primps and then does a step or two.

PIERRETTE makes a curtsy to HARLEQUIN's back. He is still busy with that promise of a mustache.

PIERRETTE does not see.

PIERROT enters. PIERROT is quite dejected and somewhat disillusioned. He continues to look back in the direction from whence he came and fails to see the change that has overtaken his wife.

PIERRETTE is too concerned with the effect she expects to have on HARLEQUIN to pay any attention to PIERROT.

HARLEQUIN looks off the scene. He is not accustomed to wait even for charming women.

PIERROT finding his wife gone goes over to the bench and prepares to commune with his lost hopes. He sees PIERRETTE. He is all interest. Who said Don Juan?

PIERRETTE manages to tack around the scene and impose herself in HARLEQUIN's line of vision. HARLEQUIN smiles in a ravishing manner.

PIERRETTE is all a-flutter.

PIERRETTE acts coyly. She is willing to be wooed.

Plays for Strolling Mummers

She is across the scene from HARLEQUIN who continues to smile and twirk what would be a mustache if it were any one else.

[It is a long time since PIERRETTE has been called upon to exercise the arts of attracting a man and she does her part rather clumsily.]

PIERROT does his best to attract the attention of this darling.

COLOMBINE enters and takes her position behind the tree. No one is conscious of her presence.

PIERRETTE continues her coy actions and HARLEQUIN laughs outright at her awkwardness.

PIERRETTE is reduced to tears.

PIERROT is still enamored of his unknown beauty.

PIERRETTE knows that all is not well with her and tries to regain her seat but she stumbles over the feet of PIERROT and lands in his lap.

PIERROT is quite taken back at the turn of events. PIERRETTE and he regain the seats they had at the opening.

HARLEQUIN observes COLOMBINE behind the tree and salutes her with exaggerated gallantry.

COLOMBINE curtsies in kind.

HARLEQUIN takes COLOMBINE's hand and raises it to his lips.

HARLEQUIN offers his arm to COLOMBINE who again curtsies before accepting it.

COLOMBINE and HARLEQUIN go off together while PIERRETTE and PIERROT look on in amazement at learning just how it is done.

PIERROT looks at PIERRETTE.

PIERRETTE looks at PIERROT.

PIERRETTE simpers.

PIERROT smiles.

PIERRETTE moves a bit closer.

The Flirtation

PIERROT does the same.

PIERROT takes PIERRETTE's hand.

PIERROT puts one arm around her.

PIERROT lifts the hand he holds to his lips.

PIERRETTE snuggles a bit closer.

PIERROT tries to kiss her.

PIERRETTE shakes her head.

PIERROT is insistent.

PIERRETTE slaps his face. He is, by this time, used to it.

PIERROT tries to peek beneath the domino.

PIERRETTE slaps his hand away.

PIERROT is at a decided disadvantage. He does not know what to do next.

PIERROT gets down upon one knee and swears undying love. He offers her the moon and the stars; he will lay the world at her feet in return for her love.

PIERRETTE, like her sisters, is much more practical.

PIERROT implores her to remove her domino.

PIERRETTE removes her domino and PIERROT is dazed.

PIERRETTE giggles and draws him back to his seat where she envelops him in her arms.

PIERRETTE holds her lips out for a kiss. PIERROT is too busy looking at the sky.

PIERRETTE roughly brings him back to the matter at hand. How about the moon and stars he promised her?

PIERROT is not at all concerned.

PIERRETTE is, as has been pointed out, practical. She wants a new dress.

PIERROT shakes his head.

PIERRETTE lets him know that she'll tell all his friends that he courted his own wife.

PIERROT pleads with her. She must not.

Plays for Strolling Mummers

Will PIERROT give PIERRETTE a new dress?

He nods.

Will PIERROT give her a new hat?

He nods.

Will PIERROT give her a new pair of shoes?

He nods.

PIERROT gets up to go. PIERRETTE has other demands to be satisfied and drags him back to his seat.

Will PIERROT give her a new book in return for her silence?

He promises.

A new necklace?

He promises.

A new [does she dare? She does] automobile?

He shakes his head.

PIERRETTE will tell the world about his adventure with COLOMBINE and how she turned him down.

PIERROT promises.

PIERRETTE puckers her lips for a kiss.

PIERROT takes her in his arms.

PIERROT hugs her tight.

PIERRETTE, when she is released, lets down her skirts, buttons up her waist, smooths down her hair and places the biddy cap on her head.

PIERROT expresses his disgust.

PIERRETTE winks an eye at the world [meaning the audience.] She knows how to handle a husband.

CURTAIN



HARLEQUIN. Thanks. Thanks. Thanks. If you could look behind the scenes you would see Pierrot and Pierrette hugging and kissing each other in delight. Great lovers are always brought together in moments of great happiness and those who know us know that there is no greater lover than Pierrot.

Once more the scene changes and so does the time. In our next effort we bring you back to the present and show you a garden wherein dwell three sisters.

ALL ON A SUMMER'S DAY

A Charming Trifle

BY COLIN CLEMENTS

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ALL ON A SUMMER'S DAY

CHARACTERS

ONE	<i>O. G. ...</i>	MAMMY, a dark messenger
TWO	<i>O. G. ...</i>	of Fate
THREE	<i>X. ...</i>	

As symbols of their respective ages: ONE wears a rose at her waist, TWO wears heavy horn glasses and THREE wears a little woolen shawl around her shoulders. In their very best white crinolines, ONE, TWO and THREE are seated on three little red stools, before a gray curtain, busily sewing colored yarn crosses into three samplers. ONE sews this way, TWO sews that way and THREE sews straight up and down.

ONE. [*She sighs.*] Oh, dear!

TWO. [*She sighs.*] Oh, dear!

THREE. [*She sighs.*] Oh, dear!

ONE. Nothing ever happens here.

TWO. Absolutely nothing, dear.

THREE. We are growing old, I fear.

ONE. Old?

TWO. Not old!

THREE. Yes; old.

ONE. [*Folding her hands.*] Oh, dear!

TWO. [*Folding her hands.*] Oh, dear!

THREE. [*Folding her hands.*] Oh, dear!

Plays for Strolling Mummers

ONE. [*She turns toward TWO.*] What do you want most to happen?

TWO. I? [*She turns to THREE.*] What do you want most to happen?

THREE. I? [*She leans forward and addresses ONE.*] What do you want most to happen?

ONE. [*With no hesitation.*] I want to get married.

TWO. [*Surprised, plainly so.*] Married?

THREE. [*Shocked, painfully so.*] Married!

ONE. Yes, I do—married.

TWO. Ugh!

THREE. Ugh!

ONE. [*She turns toward TWO.*] Well, then, what do you want?

TWO. I want to be—to be famous!

THREE. Famous? Ugh!

ONE. Ugh!

TWO. [*She turns toward THREE.*] What do you want?

THREE. I want to be—I want to be wealthy!

ONE. Wealthy? Ugh!

TWO. Ugh!

THREE. Yes; that's my wish.

[*They sit and sew in silence. ONE sews this way,
TWO sews that way and THREE sews straight up
and down.*]

ONE. Oh, dear!

TWO. Oh, dear!

THREE. Oh, dear!

ONE. We just sew—

TWO. And sew—

THREE. And sew—

ONE. Nothing ever happens to us.

TWO. No . . . nothing, nothing ever happens to us.

All on a Summer's Day

THREE. Sh—sh, my dears. Don't fuss.

ONE. [*Hopefully.*] But something might.

TWO. [*More hopefully.*] Yes . . . something might.

THREE. [*Most hopefully.*] Never has . . . but it might.

[*They sew on for a moment in silence.*]

ONE. [*Doubtfully.*] I doubt it.

TWO. [*More doubtfully.*] And I.

THREE. [*Most doubtfully.*] Well, so do I.

ONE. Oh, dear!

TWO. Oh, dear!

THREE. Oh, dear!

ONE. [*Shaking her finger.*] But then, one never knows what may happen.

TWO. [*Shaking her head.*] One can never tell.

THREE. [*Shaking her shoulders as though she felt a draft.*] True . . . one can never be sure!

ONE. I *would* like to be married.

TWO. Ugh!

THREE. Ugh! .

ONE. Ugh?

TWO. I *would* like to be famous.

THREE. Ugh!

ONE. Ugh!

TWO. Ugh?

THREE. I *would* like to be wealthy.

ONE. Ugh!

TWO. Ugh!

THREE. Ugh?

ONE. Anyway, I'm romantic.

TWO. Romantic? I'm idealistic.

THREE. Romantic? Idealistic? I'm practical.

ONE. You see, I'm still young.

TWO. I'm not old!

Plays for Strolling Mummers

THREE. I'm not so very old!

ONE. It's nice we're not all alike.

TWO. Yes; much nicer.

THREE. Oh, very much nicer.

ONE. It makes our conversations more interesting.

TWO. Yes, it makes them very much more interesting.

THREE. Our conversations? Interesting? Oh, decidedly so.

[*They sew on in silence. ONE sews this way. TWO sews that way and THREE sews straight up and down.*]

ONE. Oh, dear!

TWO. Oh, dear!

THREE. Oh, dear!

[*The curtains at the back part and a dark-faced messenger of Fate in the form of a dark mammy enters.*]

MAMMY. [*She holds out a yellow envelope to THREE.*] Telegraf fo' you-all, honey.

THREE. Telegram for me?

TWO. For her?

ONE. A telegram?

MAMMY. Yes'm. [*She blinks.*] Ah see'd a black cat dis mo'nin'.

THREE. It's from my bankers!

TWO. Your bankers? What do they say?

ONE. Perhaps your account is overdrawn again.

THREE. No; it says—

TWO. What does it say?

ONE. Tell us!

THREE. My oil wells—

TWO. Your oil wells—

ONE. Really?

MAMMY. Black cats don't mean nofin'.

All on a Summer's Day

THREE. [*Deliriously.*] I'm wealthy!

TWO. Your wish has come true.

ONE. Wishes sometimes do!

THREE. Think of it.

TWO. Just think of it!

ONE. I am.

MAMMY. Ah knowed theah was luck due dis heah house. [*She shuffles out.*] Honey, ah's just flabeagusted fo' you-all.

ONE. It's wonderful!

TWO. Just wonderful.

THREE. [*She rises and shakes down her skirts.*] I must run along and sign some checks, sign some checks.

[*She hurries out.*]

ONE. [*After a pause.*] Just think, she got her wish.

TWO. [*After a longer pause.*] I wish I'd get mine.

ONE. And I wish I'd get mine!

TWO. I'd love to be famous.

ONE. I'd love to be married.

TWO. Pooh—anybody can get married.

ONE. [*Sharply.*] Everybody doesn't, I notice.

TWO. [*Looking over the top of her glasses.*] Don't be nasty!

[*They sit and sew in silence. ONE sews this way and TWO sews that way.*]

ONE. Oh, dear!

TWO. Oh, dear!

[*Again the curtains part and the ominous black messenger enters.*]

MAMMY. Telegraf fo' you-all, honey. 'Pears like dis am a busy day.

ONE. For me?

Plays for Strolling Mummers

MAMMY. [*She hands the telegram to TWO.*] No, honey—you-all's too young to get telegrafs.

TWO. Oh! Oh-o-o!

ONE. [*All eyes and ears.*] What is it?

MAMMY. [*Grinning from ear to ear.*] Ah jus' been tellin' ma fo'tune in a tea cup and—

TWO. [*Gasping for breath.*] I'm—I'm famous!

ONE. Famous!

TWO. The first edition of my novel is sold out three months before the date of publication.

MAMMY. [*She shuffles out.*] Ah knowed dem tea leaves don' lie! Nebah! Nebah!

ONE. Think of it—famous!

TWO. Isn't it wonderful?

ONE. And it was your wish, too!

TWO. [*She rises and shakes down her skirt, then turns and hurries out.*] I must run along and—and autograph some photographs.

ONE. [*She sits and sews in silence. Slowly as if deep in thought, she sews this way.*] Oh, dear! [*She fumbles with the rose at her belt.*] Oh, dear—

[*The curtains again part and again that dark messenger of Fate comes forward.*]

MAMMY. Honey—

ONE. Is it a telegram for me this time?

MAMMY. [*Sympathetically.*] No, honey, jus' a lettah for you-all.

ONE. Letter? Letter? Give it to me!

MAMMY. Lettahs ain't no 'count.

ONE. Give it to me!

MAMMY. Theah, honey. [*She hands ONE the letter.*] 'Pears like you-all is mighty anxious to heah from—

ONE. Oh! Oh! Oh-o-o-o!

All on a Summer's Day

MAMMY. [*She stands blinking with interest.*] Is you-all wealthy, honey?

ONE. [*Still reading.*] Eh? No.

MAMMY. [*She takes a step closer.*] Is you-all famous, honey?

ONE. [*Now rereading the letter for the third time.*] Eh? No.

MAMMY. [*After a long pause.*] 'Pears like a mighty long lettah.

ONE. M-m-m-m.

MAMMY. Is dey any answer, honey?

ONE. Eh?

MAMMY. No answer?

ONE. [*She lays the letter in her lap and again takes up her sewing.*] Not just now.

MAMMY. [*She turns and shuffles out.*] Ah guess we ain't so lucky aftah all. Ah knowed black cats don't bring no good luck.

ONE. [*Sewing again.*] Oh, dear! . [*She looks around quickly to make sure that MAMMY is well out of sight, then, rereading the letter for the fourth time, she carefully folds it up and pokes it down the front of her waist to a spot close above her heart. Then another thought seizes her; quickly she takes the rose from her belt and, pulling off the petals, shakes them down over the letter. She giggles, kicks her feet with delight and, again taking up her sampler begins deliriously to sew this way, that way, and straight up and down.*] Oh, dear! Oh, dear!

THE CURTAIN FALLS GENTLY



HARLEQUIN. And, now, my very dear and appreciative friends, the strolling players invite you to come with them to Paris. There is an old saw about there being nothing worse than owing money you can't pay except, perhaps, being owed money you can't collect. This little play will show how a certain merchant of Paris—but that is going too far. Let us say, rather, it is a tale of money owed and a careless debtor, a beautiful woman and a little love.

MY TAILOR

A Comedy of Life

BY ALFRED CAPUS

Translated by Harold Harper

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CHARACTERS

Plays for Strolling Mummers

PIERRE. You may rap very discreetly on the door.
[*Catching sight of a bill on the table.*] What's this?

CLÉMENTENCE. A bill that the porter just brought up.
I forgot to give it to Monsieur.

PIERRE. Why, if you please?

CLÉMENTENCE. It wasn't important. It's from Plantin, the tailor.

PIERRE. I see. [*Reads.*] "At the request of M. Plantin," hm!—"pay three thousand two hundred francs." So my tailor is threatening me!

CLÉMENTENCE. It's perfectly shameful!

PIERRE. Three thousand two hundred francs! I had no idea I owed him three thousand two hundred francs!

CLÉMENTENCE. [*Coming close to him.*] Monsieur won't be angry, will he, if I ask him one question?

PIERRE. Go ahead, Clémence.

CLÉMENTENCE. Is Monsieur quite out of cash?

PIERRE. Why do you ask?

CLÉMENTENCE. Because I was saying to Jean only yesterday that we'd be only too glad to stay with Monsieur without wages.

PIERRE. Thank you.

CLÉMENTENCE. Monsieur could pay us later—with interest. My husband and I have great confidence in you.

PIERRE. No, no, Clémence. I am not down to my last sou, I am simply—in straits.

CLÉMENTENCE. Monsieur is too generous.

PIERRE. And besides, you know I am expecting a letter from my uncle.

CLÉMENTENCE. [*Smiling.*] With money?

PIERRE. Yes. [*The bell rings.*] Oh, there—

CLÉMENTENCE. I'll open the door. Perhaps it's the postman.

My Tailor

PIERRE. Or the lady.

CLÉMENTCE. [*At the door.*] Which would Monsieur prefer: the lady or the postman?

PIERRE. The lady, because the postman is always sure to come again. [CLÉMENTCE *goes out.* PIERRE *looks at his watch.*] Half-past two. [*The door opens and MARGUERITE enters. PIERRE advances to meet her.*] This is indeed delightful!

MARGUERITE. Too delightful, I'm afraid. I'd like to go at once.

PIERRE. That would be criminal. Please sit down, and take off your hat. Shall I help you?

MARGUERITE. It's scarcely worth while. I know what you are thinking.

PIERRE. If you knew what I thought you would take off your hat.

MARGUERITE. You think, "She's an ordinary little flirt."

PIERRE. Do you imagine for one moment—?

MARGUERITE. I wouldn't give you my address but you insisted on following me. I took a cab and you took another and followed me. I spent two hours riding about the city.

PIERRE. I offered to reimburse you!

MARGUERITE. Finally, I was forced to take refuge at a friend's home. Some days later, we met by chance. Since I am here to-day you must think me very common.

PIERRE. And you must think me a cad! I will admit that if at first you had accepted an invitation to dine with me, I should doubtless have spent an agreeable evening, but I should not have had a very high opinion of you.

MARGUERITE. While after two months—?

PIERRE. After two months, I say to myself: "She

Plays for Strolling Mummers

is certainly a married woman." I am right, am I not?

MARGUERITE. In a way, you *are* right. But you are quite mistaken if you think me capable of any real folly.

PIERRE. I shouldn't think of allowing you to exceed the bounds of propriety.

MARGUERITE. A woman who hasn't enough to keep her interested may be led by curiosity, for the sake of a little adventure—but there is a vast gulf between that and forgetting one's duties.

PIERRE. I don't ask you to forget your duties, I only wish you would not keep thinking of them.

MARGUERITE. You may rest assured that if you had not mentioned the names of three or four common friends I should never have consented to come here, on any pretext whatsoever.

[*She sits down.*]

PIERRE. I quite believe it. But you must admit that *my* behavior has been irreproachable. I told you my name at once, and was tactful enough not to insist upon knowing your husband's. I merely asked you for your first name.

MARGUERITE. I'll wager you've already forgotten it.

PIERRE. [*Going to her.*] I'll whisper it!

MARGUERITE. [*Edging away from him.*] I can hear from this distance quite as well.

PIERRE. It's Marguerite. My favorite name.

MARGUERITE. How nice! [PIERRE *again attempts to come close to her.*] Will you be good enough to stay where you are? So far, you have been courteous and gallant; don't spoil it.

PIERRE. I adore you. I loved you from the first moment—

MARGUERITE. And my presence here proves that you are not entirely indifferent to me.

My Tailor

marq.
PIERRE. I don't deny it. *but*

MARGUERITE. A woman should reflect for months and months.

PIERRE. But always end by deciding in the affirmative.

MARGUERITE. And even then, she must consider—and wait, for the psychological, the magnificent and beautiful moment. A woman's only excuse is in giving her love as one gives a birthday present.

PIERRE. And to-day is my birthday!

MARGUERITE. Before I decide to interest myself in you, I must first learn something of your habits, your tastes, your manner of living.

PIERRE. Of course. Ask me, I'll answer.

MARGUERITE. Don't walk about like that. Sit down, as you asked me to do. There— Not so close.

PIERRE. I am ready.

MARGUERITE. How old are you? Answer me truthfully.

PIERRE. Thirty-four.

MARGUERITE. Have you a profession?

PIERRE. No.

MARGUERITE. You have some sort of income?

PIERRE. I have.

MARGUERITE. You are a waster, a man-about-town.

PIERRE. I beg your pardon!

MARGUERITE. You are dissipated.

PIERRE. I beg your pardon— I am not in the least dissipated.

MARGUERITE. Do you gamble?

PIERRE. Oh, I—

MARGUERITE. I feel sure you do.

PIERRE. I say—

MARGUERITE. You are a gambler. Oh, dear! I have a perfect horror of gambling.

Plays for Strolling Mummers

PIERRE. I'll reform.

MARGUERITE. I doubt it.

[*She rises.*]

PIERRE. My word of honor, I *will* reform. The moment you came into the room, I swore I would never touch another card.

MARGUERITE. That was probably because you lost last night.

PIERRE. That was not the only reason.

MARGUERITE. The worst thing for a woman is to have anything to do with a gambler. When a gambler has lost, he will hardly look at her.

PIERRE. But when he wins—?

MARGUERITE. He deceives her. I had a cousin once who beat his wife every time he lost.

PIERRE. That was to give him luck.

MARGUERITE. And then, gamblers are always in debt. I'm sure you have debts?

PIERRE. Who hasn't?

MARGUERITE. If you have debts, then you have creditors; they're always at the door, they make scenes with you in the street. They have no respect for women. How lovely it would be! [*She catches sight of the bill on the table.*] What is that?

PIERRE. Nothing.

MARGUERITE. It's a bill. See where your gambling has brought you! You're being threatened!

PIERRE. That was a mistake.

MARGUERITE. Who sent it? The landlord?

PIERRE. It's not even from my landlord. It's from my tailor!

MARGUERITE. [*Indignantly.*] Don't you pay your tailor?

PIERRE. He doesn't deserve to have me pay him.

My Tailor

Think of it, to threaten me, one of his best customers! He will pay dearly for this!

MARGUERITE. But you are in the wrong.

PIERRE. He dresses me very poorly, too!

MARGUERITE. I don't think so. You look stylish.

PIERRE. [*Modestly.*] Oh!

MARGUERITE. I don't mean that you yourself are distinctly elegant, but you are well-dressed. I noticed that the first thing.

PIERRE. Thanks.

MARGUERITE. That always makes a great difference with me. Do you owe your tailor much?

PIERRE. I don't remember exactly how much. [*Taking the bill.*] "Three thousand two hundred francs."

MARGUERITE. An enormous bill.

PIERRE. Plus the costs.

MARGUERITE. I suppose you owe a good deal to your bootmaker?

PIERRE. I don't deny—

MARGUERITE. And your haberdasher?

PIERRE. Oh, yes!

MARGUERITE. Your landlord and all the rest of them! They will all sue you. I'm going.

PIERRE. Marguerite, please!

MARGUERITE. That same cousin of mine—

PIERRE. Oh, forget your cousin. I had a cousin, too.

MARGUERITE. Was he a gambler?

PIERRE. Worse than yours.

MARGUERITE. Impossible.

PIERRE. He spent every night at the club, and lost all his money. One day he met a woman and loved her, a woman like you; but *she* was indulgent toward

Plays for Strolling Mummers

human frailties; she forgave him; so sweetly did she do it, that he never felt the desire to begin again his evil courses.

MARGUERITE. [*Allowing PIERRE to take her hand.*] And what did your cousin then do?

PIERRE. He wanted to prove that he was worthy of her, so he stopped gambling.

MARGUERITE. Good.

PIERRE. And after he had reformed in one respect, he reformed in every other. He lived a regular life and paid his debts.

MARGUERITE. Ah!

PIERRE. His landlord.

MARGUERITE. His bootmaker.

PIERRE. His haberdasher.

MARGUERITE. And his tailor?

PIERRE. And his tailor—thanks to the influence of a good woman. He did everything she wanted him to do, merely at a look from her.

[*He induces her to sit down, and then kneels to her.*]

MARGUERITE. Was that really your cousin?

PIERRE. A very close cousin, practically a brother. [*He kisses her hand. A short silence.*] If you want to be very good, do you know what you would do—if you wanted to reform me?

MARGUERITE. What?

PIERRE. Take off your hat and let me look at your hair. I haven't yet seen it. And then you would take a tiny glass of port, and a biscuit.

MARGUERITE. [*Taking off her hat.*] Very well. I'm obliging, am I not?

PIERRE. [*Brings a little table to her; starts to get a carafe of port, and glasses.*] You are exquisite!

MARGUERITE. Only one glass—and one biscuit.

My Tailor

Marg. [There is a discreet knock at the door.] Some one's knocking!

PIERRE. Don't be alarmed. I know who it is.

MARGUERITE. Perhaps it's the bailiff?

PIERRE. On the contrary!

[He opens the door. CLÉMENCE enters with the postman's book. She gives a letter to him, and speaks in an undertone.]

CLÉMENCE. Here is the registered letter. Sign there.

PIERRE. [To MARGUERITE.] Will you pardon me a moment? I must sign for this letter. [He goes to the table and signs. A moment later he gives the book to CLÉMENCE.] Here, Clémence, and don't forget to give something to the postman.

CLÉMENCE. Very well, Monsieur.

[She goes out.]

PIERRE. Now, you will have a biscuit.

[He serves her.]

MARGUERITE. Read your letter, I'll serve myself.

PIERRE. Will you allow me? [He opens the letter, and says to MARGUERITE.] It's from my uncle.

MARGUERITE. [Laughing.] Sending money to his naughty nephew?

PIERRE. Right!

MARGUERITE. Who had doubtless told him some ridiculous tale?

PIERRE. And if I did—

MARGUERITE. In order to gamble again? If he knew that, he would never have sent it.

PIERRE. Marguerite, I'll be frank with you. I did intend to play with these five thousand francs to-night.

MARGUERITE. How horrible!

PIERRE. If you wish it, I'll not go.

Plays for Strolling Mummers

MARGUERITE. Now you are wise. That's a good point.

PIERRE. [*Going to her and trying to kiss her.*] And here's another.

MARGUERITE. [*Gently repulsing him.*] No, not yet.

PIERRE. But—to encourage me in my new life?

MARGUERITE. [*Rising.*] Are you really in earnest? Will you follow the straight and narrow?

PIERRE. If you will come with me.

MARGUERITE. I don't say no, but I must have some guarantee, some proof—

PIERRE. Tell me what proofs. Guide me.

MARGUERITE. First of all, you must make good use of this money.

PIERRE. How?

MARGUERITE. By paying your debts.

PIERRE. I may as well tell you these five thousand francs will cover only a very small part of them.

MARGUERITE. But if you don't begin, it will always be like that. Pay the creditors who are threatening you. Don't let the costs mount up.

PIERRE. Pay my tailor? Never!

MARGUERITE. Why not? Some time you will have to pay him. You might as well now, when you can.

PIERRE. He'll be the last. He threatens me!

MARGUERITE. All the more reason for getting rid of him. I don't care which one you pay first; I just don't want you to squander this money. I want you to lead a regular life. That's the only condition on which I might, some day—

PIERRE. You are an angel. I'll obey you, and begin my new life this very evening.

MARGUERITE. Splendid!

My Tailor

PIERRE. But I'll not pay my tailor. My bootmaker, yes.

MARGUERITE. How much do you owe him?

PIERRE. Eighty francs.

MARGUERITE. Ridiculous. You're incorrigible. I may as well go.

[She rises, but PIERRE makes her sit down again.]

PIERRE. Marguerite, my dear Marguerite, don't be cruel. *Please stay*

MARGUERITE. I'm not cruel. You ask me to give up everything, and when I ask you to make the most insignificant sacrifices—

PIERRE. But I owe that damned tailor three thousand francs!

MARGUERITE. What do I care for your tailor and your bootmaker? I am asking for a proof of your esteem. If I asked you for that three thousand francs for myself, you'd give it to me at once!

PIERRE. Certainly. I'd much prefer that.

MARGUERITE. But when I implore you to put the money to good use, and try to do you a real service, you refuse. This is unworthy of you!

PIERRE. I don't absolutely refuse, I'm just thinking, considering. It's a very delicate matter—to pay one's tailor, all at once! A deplorable precedent to establish!

MARGUERITE. I suppose so. I know that you men consider your tailors as a race apart. They don't need money. They're the only people in the world who couldn't use it, and your social etiquette doesn't permit you to pay their bills.

PIERRE. It's a custom that goes far back into antiquity.

MARGUERITE. Little you care about his wife and children! I once knew a little tailor, who had cus-

Plays for Strolling Mummers

tomers of your sort, who never paid him—said he was only a tailor, and so on. He begged the customers, supplicated them, explained that he had no money, and they all said just what you say. And that little tailor, who clothed so many people, hasn't enough money to buy himself a shirt!

PIERRE. Mine is richer than I, and he has no children.

MARGUERITE. Perhaps he has a wife?

PIERRE. Yes, he is married—has been for the last three or four years. I've heard that his wife is very charming.

MARGUERITE. A tailor's wife? Think of it!

PIERRE. He's a very fortunate tailor to have you plead for him. You've persuaded me to pay him one of these days. I'll do it on one condition.

MARGUERITE. What is that?

PIERRE. That you let me kiss you.

MARGUERITE. Not to-day.

PIERRE. When?

MARGUERITE. When you pay your tailor. I insist.

PIERRE. Just a tiny little kiss?

MARGUERITE. When you have paid your tailor.

PIERRE. But I will pay him—soon. To-morrow. I promise.

MARGUERITE. Why not to-day? This moment? You have the cash.

PIERRE. Would it please you?

MARGUERITE. It would prove that I mean at least a little to you.

PIERRE. And then you will let me kiss you?

MARGUERITE. We'll see. But you must first pay your tailor.

PIERRE. I'll send my servant with the money.

My Tailor

MARGUERITE. That's it, and don't forget to ask for a receipt.

PIERRE. I'm not afraid: he's an honest man; an awful bother, but honest.

MARGUERITE. Call for your servant, and have it over with.

PIERRE. [*Reflecting.*] Suppose I send him something on account?

MARGUERITE. No, you must send it all.

PIERRE. You prefer it?

MARGUERITE. Much.

PIERRE. Then I will. Am I not obedient?

MARGUERITE. You're very nice.

PIERRE. Where's an envelope? Here! [*He puts the money into the envelope.*] One, two, three, and then two hundred— You fully realize, don't you, what a tremendous sacrifice I am making?

MARGUERITE. But you will reap the benefit. Shall I ring?

PIERRE. [*Ring.*] There! Now for the address. [*Writing.*] "Monsieur Plantin." [*To MARGUERITE, laughing.*] His name's Plantin!

MARGUERITE. [*Laughing.*] How funny!

[CLÉMENTINE appears.]

CLÉMENTINE. Yes, Monsieur?

PIERRE. Has Jean returned yet?

CLÉMENTINE. Yes, Monsieur.

PIERRE. Tell him to take this at once.

CLÉMENTINE. Immediately?

PIERRE. Without losing a minute. Tell him there's no answer. Go now.

CLÉMENTINE. Yes, Monsieur.

[*She looks at the address, and goes out.*]

PIERRE. [*Returning to MARGUERITE, who has risen,*

Plays for Strolling Mummers

and taking her hands in his.] I feel already that you are going to make a little saint of me.

MARGUERITE. I am deeply gratified by what you have done.

PIERRE. And my recompense—?

MARGUERITE. Impossible.

PIERRE. [*Laughing.*] I can't help laughing when I think how little my tailor suspects the real reason for my paying him!

MARGUERITE. I shan't tell him, at any rate.

PIERRE. [*Astonished.*] Do you know him?

MARGUERITE. He's my husband.

PIERRE. [*Dumbfounded.*] Your—?

MARGUERITE. I am Madame Plantin.

PIERRE. You?

MARGUERITE. Yes. Believe me, I am deeply grateful.

PIERRE. Admirably played! My compliments! Your trick was quite successful.

MARGUERITE. In what way did I trick you?

PIERRE. Your hat, Madame. Convey my felicitations to Monsieur Plantin.

MARGUERITE. I think I *had* better go.

[*She puts on her hat.*]

PIERRE. This is a pretty situation! To take advantage of a man! Make him fall in love with you! Delightful!

MARGUERITE. Do you think me capable of behaving that way simply for the sake of a few thousand miserable francs?

PIERRE. What other reason had you?

MARGUERITE. How little you know of the heart of woman!

PIERRE. Thank God!

MARGUERITE. It was only after you had told me

My Tailor

your name that I thought it amusing. It *was* amusing, wasn't it?

PIERRE. No!

MARGUERITE. I was vastly amused. It was only after that that it occurred to me to profit by the occasion and make you pay your debts. This one was causing you a great deal of trouble, and as for the costs—!

PIERRE. Very good of you, indeed!

MARGUERITE. I think I behaved as a good friend would. And now instead of being grateful, you practically insult me.

PIERRE. If I have insulted you, I beg your pardon.

MARGUERITE. And who knows but that my interest in you may, little by little—?

PIERRE. You're not going to make me believe that you love me?

MARGUERITE. No, I don't; I haven't the right to love you. A woman with any delicacy could never love a man who owed her husband money.

PIERRE. [*Going toward her.*] But *now* I don't owe him any money.

MARGUERITE. I shall remember you with great pleasure, and when I am bored—which I often am—I shall—think of our little adventure!

PIERRE. Will you ever return?

MARGUERITE. You never can tell—!

CURTAIN



HARLEQUIN. I am sure your applause is all out of proportion to the merit of our performance and that I must classify you as a little group of flatterers. However, do not let these remarks deter you: I assure you it is meat and drink to us.

How often each and every one of you has lamented his place in this world. Any old job is better than mine you often think. Well, once upon a time, there was a man who wanted to be something else. Fortunately for him he found another man who envied him his job. Phillips Russell, a young American newspaper man, has dramatized the incident for us. It has no moral attached so let your enjoyment be full and without condition.

[HARLEQUIN *bows and the curtains close.*]

A COURSE IN PIRACY

A Burlesque Comedy

BY PHILLIPS RUSSELL

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A COURSE IN PIRACY

CHARACTERS

R.P.O. MAJORIBANKS, a fugitive	HENRY SHEER, captain of the <i>Orca</i>
BUTT-EYED BILL, first mate of the corsair <i>Orca</i>	GORILLA GARBUTT, second mate
THREE PIRATE SAILORS	

Tea time in mess cabin of pirate ship. Baize-covered table in center. At right and left open doors leading to hatchway stairs. Chairs at either end of table. On table are teapot, cups, knife and a huge dark loaf shaped like pudding. Lanterns, cutlasses, coils of rope, and nautical articles on walls. Cabin lighted by lanterns swung from ceiling.

[*Curtain discloses MARJORIBANKS seated huddled at table on left, facing audience. He is elaborately dressed in pirate costume, over which dark cloak is thrown. His black pirate hat on which white skull and crossbones are painted is tilted back, showing orange kerchief around head. He wears a pistol in belt, horn-rimmed glasses on nose, and is reading a pocket-size book. He occasionally glances apprehensively right and left, and when a thud is heard off stage he starts violently and half rises.*]

[*Enter BUTT-EYED BILL bearing pitcher of hot water, which he pours into teapot. He is a*

Plays for Strolling Mummers

grizzled figure with a huge red nose. He wears a red kerchief around his head, bell-bottomed trousers, black choker, and red sash. He speaks in a hoarse cockney voice.]

BILL. [*Sitting down on right and drawing up chair.*] An' now I'll 'ave me tea. [*Sighs.*] Bust my binnacle, but the skipper is blowin' a gyle like 'Atteras to-dye. Standin' on deck there 'owlin' like a proper loonatick an' callin' the people nimes that 'ud make a sarjint-myjer turn teetotal. Nothin' pleases 'im, nothin' soots 'im. I 'ope the 'orspittle cabin's not locked, fer somebody's like to be took there in a 'urry, an' that bleedin' soon. [*Pours tea and cuts slice from loaf. Series of bumps is heard off stage.*] There 'e goes now. I bet a doubloon to a brass fardin' 'e's got the third myte down, an' is a-chewin' of 'is ear orf. Gorblimey, but 'ow the captin' 'ates that third myte. Serve 'im right, too. The blighter thinks he's goin' to git my job. [MARJORIBANKS *nods ingratiatingly.*] 'Ush! [BILL *puts his hand to ear.*] Think I 'eard a splash. P'raps 'e's throwed the third myte h'over-board. "Feed the sharks reg'lar," says the skipper, "an' they'll bring good luck." [*To MARJORIBANKS.*] 'Ere, 'ave a slice. [MARJORIBANKS *accepts it, and chews it with great difficulty as if it were very sticky. He continues to chew and nod while BILL goes on.*] 'E got the wind up 'smornin' 'cause 'e 'ad to mike 'is breakfast orf Chrismus pudd'n, and a cup o' Oxo. That's what comes o' bein' becalmed. We ain't raided a ship in thirty-seving dyes. Wudja believe it? [MARJORIBANKS *shakes head and chews.*] Nothin' left in the larder but fower barrels o' Chrismus pudd'n an' six cubes o' Oxo. Chrismus pudd'n fer breakfus, Chrismus pudd'n fer tea, an' more Chrismus pudd'n

A Course in Piracy

for dinner. Yer can't blime the captin' fer gittin' wild. Arfter thirty-seving dyes o' it, I'm sort o' weak'nin' myself. Larst night I dreamt of a big dish o' tripe an' onions, an' woke up cryin'. 'Ere, 'ave another slice. It swallers as heasy as hinjy-rubber, don't it? [MARJORIBANKS *nods and smiles.*] But wot's the matter you don't put your h'oar into our pleasink little chit-chat? 'Ere I've been torkin' like pumps in a 'ead-wind, and you sit there like a ventrolloquisk's dummy. Is the captin' busted you one in the jor, or arfter orl these years o' ker-roozin' the pirate seas 'ave you suddinkly turnt seasick?

[MARJORIBANKS *grimaces as if food was stuck in teeth, vainly puts finger in mouth, and finally looks at BILL helplessly.*]

BILL. Is it got into your sore tooth? 'Ere, lemme look. I kin git the blacksmith's wrench and 'ave that stump out in a jiff. [BILL *rises and goes over to MARJORIBANKS and steps back.*] Well, ram me and sink me, but I thort you was Gorilla Garbutt! A-settin' there with yore black 'at on. [*Leans down.*] Sye, 'oo are you?

[MARJORIBANKS *dislodges food, gulps and finally speaks.*]

MARJORIBANKS. I—er—I'm a new member of the crew, you see.

BILL. A new member? Well, you must be bloody new, fer smash me bow-lights if I ever seen you afore. When did you sign on?

MARJORIBANKS. Last night, I—er—think it was.

BILL. Larst night, hey? Well, if you'll 'scuse me fer h'askin' sich personal questions, 'ow did you git 'ere on board this ship?

MARJORIBANKS. I—er—swam.

Plays for Strolling Mummers

BILL. You swum? An' we a 'undred leagues from the nearest land? Sye, come off! Show us yer card.

MARJORIBANKS. Well, really, I'm awfully sorry, but I didn't bring any. It never occurred to me that visiting cards would be required out here in the ocean.

BILL. Visitin' cards be blowed. It's your union card I want—showin' you're in good standin' in the Pirates' International, see?

MARJORIBANKS. Union card? [*Feeling in pockets.*] I'm afraid I left it at Southampton. I am so awfully careless about some of the most important things.

BILL. Mm! Seems to me I smell a dead fish som'ers. [*Walks around MARJORIBANKS, glaring.*] Look 'ere, my fine young corse-hair, what's the gime? Split my halyards if I like your looks. [*Shouting towards door.*] Avast there, on deck! One of you ditch-diggers fetch me the butcher's cleaver. There's a job to be done 'ere.

MARJORIBANKS. [*Rising and pulling at BILL'S sash.*] Stay! Please do not call any one, I beg you. I have a perfectly reasonable explanation to make. [*Reaches into pocket, hands over coin.*] Here! There's a gold sovereign for you—you can procure yourself a couple of cigars when next you are in port. And there might be other gold pieces later if we should happen to reach the Spanish Main—I have a friend there, and if we can agree upon—er—certain arrangements, or a *modus operandi*, so to speak. Please resume your seat while I say one word.

[*BILL sniffs coin, jingles it on table, pockets it, and consents to sit down.*]

BILL. Well, I do fancy a good seegar once in a woile, an' as I used to sye to my old woman, I alwus likes ter keep a h'open mind. Now then!

MARJORIBANKS. [*Seated again.*] The position is

A Course in Piracy

not as mysterious as, at first blush, it might appear. I will be brief. [*Takes off glasses and polishes them.*] When you last touched at the Azores, I swam out to the ship one night, climbed over the stern, and stowed away.

BILL. Well, squeeze my lee-scuppers! An' wot 'ave yer lived on?

MARJORIBANKS. Oh, I had, before I left London, provided myself with a jar of Crosse and Blackwell's strawberry jam and a bag of Lyons' cakes.

BILL. I see, I see.

MARJORIBANKS. Day after day I waited for a favorable opportunity to reveal myself. But none seemed to come. The captain was always in such a fearful temper. So I lay low until last night when my last cake—a lemon-cheese tart it was—was exhausted. And so this afternoon, unable longer to resist the pangs of hunger, I came out on deck. As I pretended to be doing sea work, you understand, and since I had provided myself with this costume, into which I changed after coming on board, no one noticed me. So I crept into this chamber and finding it unoccupied and with food on the table, I remained here, studying my lessons and trying to make myself as comfortable as the circumstances would permit. I confess, now that I am revealing all, that I more than once helped myself to the Christmas pudding. I was driven to it by sheer hunger. I found it, despite a certain gummy—or, shall I say, mucilaginous texture—rather tasty. In fact, I fear that, whilst sitting here, I lowered its cubic contents by several degrees.

BILL. Good job, too. Lemme know when you git hungry ag'in, an' I'll open you a private barrel. But wot's all this a-leadin' h'up to? Wot's it all abaout?

MARJORIBANKS. Simply this. I have formed the

Plays for Strolling Mummers

intention—the unalterable purpose, you might say—of becoming a pirate.

BILL. H'indeed!

MARJORIBANKS. Yes, and further, I nourish the ambition of some day becoming a pirate chief, in command of my own ship. You've no idea how glad I was to find that an old-time corsair like the *Orca* was still running.

BILL. [*Sitting back and strumming on table.*] Well! Nothin' picayune about you, is there? But, at this junk-chewer, might I arsk as to your speshul qualifications?

MARJORIBANKS. Well, I have read with the closest attention the article on "Piracy" in the India paper edition of the *Encyclopedia Britannica*. I have also studied the names of the various sails on a full-rigged ship—such as spinnaker, barnacle and boom—as printed in *Chambers' Dictionary*. And finally I have completed a guaranteed correspondence course with what seems to be an excellent mail-order institution in Leeds.

BILL. *What!* A correspondence course in piracy?

MARJORIBANKS. No, in seamanship.

BILL. Oh!

MARJORIBANKS. And now we come to the point. I am aware that I require a bit of practical experience—in the hard everyday problems, as it were, of operating a pirate ship. Particularly as regards the finer points of seamanship. Some of the various sailors' knots, for example, are so confusing. It is there that I should value your help. If you will only introduce me to the captain, arrange matters with him, take me under your wing and coach me properly during this voyage I shall be glad to discuss with you a remunerative fee.

BILL. [*After musing.*] So! You want me to be

A Course in Piracy

a kind of sea-tutor in a sort of pirate preparatory school, eh? [MARJORIBANKS *nods brightly.*] Um, well! P'raps it could be arranged, at that. The 'ard part will come in explainin' you to the captin'g.

MARJORIBANKS. Yes, I quite understand.

BILL. Fust thing, let's have your monicker.

MARJORIBANKS. Pardon?

BILL. Your monicker, your handle, *your nyme*, blarst it!

MARJORIBANKS. Oh! It's rather a long one. Perhaps I'd better write it out for you.

[*Takes out paper from pocket, tears off piece, writes, and hands over.*]

BILL. [*Reading.*] Mr. Reginald Percy Owen Marjoribanks.

MARJORIBANKS. Marchbanks, please!

BILL. Well, Reginald, me bold sea-rover, that won't hardly do fer a member of a pirate crew. We got to 'ave something shorter aboard this 'ere ship. How about Gimlet?

MARJORIBANKS. [*Gesturing.*] Whatever suits your convenience and that of your associates.

BILL. Well, then, *that* much is settled. Next comes—let me see now—. [*Heavy tread is heard off stage.*] [*Tensely.*] Hist! Great boiled turbot! The skipper!

[*BILL springs to attention and salutes.* MARJORIBANKS *rises uncertainly as CAPTAIN enters. He wears three-cornered hat, frilled coat, high boots and prominent sword on which he keeps one hand. Twists mustache with other. Fierce in expression, with pale sunken face and deep-set eyes.*]

CAPTAIN. [*Sardonically.*] Well, Mr. Tilling, have you finished pouring your afternoon tea?

BILL. Ay, ay, sir.

Plays for Strolling Mummers

CAPTAIN. Then take the deck. Jerk that Southwark wharf rat off the helm and give it to a man with steel in his sinews, if you've got such a thing in this sniveling crew of farm laborers, mandolin players, and qualified accountants.

BILL. Ay, ay, sir.

CAPTAIN. There's a cloud no bigger than a No. 12 boot on the horizon nor' by nor' west, and it may mean the end of this cursed becalmment. If a gale rises, it will rise quick and strike us like a thunderclap. Watch that cloud with an eagle's eye, and at the first breath of wind, send for me here.

BILL. Ay, ay, sir.

CAPTAIN. Lively now!

BILL. Ay, ay, sir. But, sir, could I—

CAPTAIN. [*Banging with chair.*] Get on with it.

BILL. [*Saluting.*] Ay, ay, sir.

[*Wheels and goes out. CAPTAIN takes turn about room, whirls and confronts MARJORIBANKS, who smiles feebly. As CAPTAIN glares silently MARJORIBANKS uneasily removes hat, dislodging head-wrap, which, with book in one hand, he vainly tries to adjust.*]

CAPTAIN. Well, don't stand around here. Go and tell the first mate to take his jib in.

MARJORIBANKS. Very well, sir.

[*Accidentally drops book and stoops for it.*]

CAPTAIN. What?

MARJORIBANKS. [*Jerking himself up.*] That is to say. Ay, ay, sir.

CAPTAIN. Well, then, hurry up about it.

MARJORIBANKS. Ay, ay, sir.

[*Starts out.*]

CAPTAIN. Come back here! [MARJORIBANKS turns.] What are you going to say to the first mate?

A Course in Piracy

MARJORIBANKS. I shall direct him to jake his tib in, sir. That is—to bib his take in. I mean—

CAPTAIN. Come here! you swivel-topped turnip. Let me look at you. [*Tears open MARJORIBANKS' cloak.*] Where did you get this masquerade outfit? It didn't come from this ship. Do you call yourself a pirate seaman?

MARJORIBANKS. No-no, not exactly, sir.

CAPTAIN. Then what are you?

MARJORIBANKS. Before taking up this profession, sir, I was a curate.

CAPTAIN. Ha, ha! A curate, forsooth! Where?

MARJORIBANKS. In a Somerset village, sir.

CAPTAIN. How did you get in here?

MARJORIBANKS. Through the door, sir.

CAPTAIN. [*Drawing sword.*] Come, my Somerset warbler, and cough up. And mind you tell me a straight story or I'll stick you through like a kidney on a hot hairpin.

MARJORIBANKS. I assure you, my captain, no violence is necessary. I shall be most pleased to relate the facts. [*CAPTAIN sits down and glares.*] I assume that I am addressing Captain Sheer?

CAPTAIN. That's my name, yes.

MARJORIBANKS. [*Beaming.*] You see, I've heard so much about you that I feel as if I quite knew you.

CAPTAIN. Ah!

MARJORIBANKS. But first, sir, let me go back to the beginning, and say that though for several years I was a clergyman in name, I was always a pirate at heart. I doubt, sir, my ability to make you realize the intensity with which, year after year, whilst I went about my lowly duties in a sleepy little village, I longed for a bad, mad piratical life. [*CAPTAIN leans forward, staring.*] Oh, sir, do not condemn me! You would

Plays for Strolling Mummers

understand, you would in a degree forgive, if you knew how—as I lay awake night after night with the moonlight streaming over my pillow and the neighbors' horses making the typical domestic sounds in their stables—how my thoughts were tortured—and I use the word advisedly—tortured with dreams of vigorous combats on slippery decks, of masculine carouses over a butt of canary sack, of thrillingly coarse songs hurled into the teeth of the gale, of the forcible capture of swooning ladies from fat ocean liners, and of a long, low rakish craft plunging over the wide and desolate seas into the far unknown. . . . Am I talking too much, sir?

CAPTAIN. I am listening, my friend. Pray proceed.

MARJORIBANKS. One day, as I was about to go on my annual holiday, I formed a sudden resolution. I had contemplated a modest sea voyage to the island of Jersey, but instead, I booked to the Azores, for I had read in the Marine Intelligence column in the *Angus Bull Breeder* that the *Orca* had put in there for supplies. And I knew there could be only one *Orca*—the last of the pirate clippers, commanded by that daring and resourceful buccaneer, Captain Henry Sheer. [*They rise and bow simultaneously.*] On my arrival, it was the work of but a midnight moment to stowaway on the ship, where I have only now revealed myself, and where, my captain, I cast myself on your sympathy and crave your consideration.

CAPTAIN. And what is it you wish me to do?

MARJORIBANKS. [*Spreading out hands.*] Teach me modern piracy.

CAPTAIN. [*Thoughtfully.*] Well, modern piracy has become a difficult study to master, what with these new-fangled petrol boats and turbine steamers putt-putting all the way from Singapore to Sheerness.

A Course in Piracy

MARJORIBANKS. I am aware of that, sir. But if you knew how eager I was to learn!

CAPTAIN. Have you had any experience at all? Can you weigh up good doubloons? Have you murdered any high-born ladies in their bath? Have you practiced any infamies whatever?

MARJORIBANKS. N-not exactly that, sir. But I have done what I could. I have committed to memory all the sea shanties printed in an anthology procured from the village library. I have conscientiously studied the lives of the leading pirates from the days of the vikings and I have compiled quite a list of nautical terms and their synonyms.

CAPTAIN. What is that book there?

MARJORIBANKS. [*Picking it up.*] A textbook on navigation and emergencies at sea. Oh, yes! I omitted to tell you that I have taken a thorough course in seamanship-by-mail. This volume was the last of the series.

CAPTAIN. Let me look at it, will you? We are short of humor and light essays in the ship's library. [*Takes book.*] Your odd narrative has affected me strangely. I recognize in you a man of single-mindedness and sincerity. You say you were a curate in a sleepy village?

MARJORIBANKS. Ay, ay, sir.

CAPTAIN. The life was peaceful and undisturbed?

MARJORIBANKS. Quite.

CAPTAIN. You lived in a vine-clad cottage, doubtless, where there was a study, plenty of books, a reading lamp and an easy chair?

MARJORIBANKS. Precisely, sir.

CAPTAIN. You fed the fowls which gathered at your doorstep at dusk, you were respected by the community, you heard on Sunday mornings the bells ringing

Plays for Strolling Mummers

over the downs, you lived a life of sacrifice and self-denial.

MARJORIBANKS. All those things, ay, ay, sir.

[CAPTAIN *draws hastily from pocket a lace handkerchief and wipes away a tear.*]

CAPTAIN. Excuse my emotion, but some people have all the luck. [MARJORIBANKS' *mouth opens.*] In return for your confidences, let me now speak with equal candor. [*Rises and paces floor.*] I was born, I don't know where, at an unrecorded date, of parents whom I do not recall. At an early age I was apprenticed to a Glasgow bookmaker. Afterwards I collected tuppences for chair tickets in Hyde Park. From which it was a short and easy step to avowed piracy. To this I have given the best energies of my young manhood. But all these years I have been haunted—nay, pursued—by a deep-seated and resistless craving for goodness and virtue. Think you that I exult in robbery, in violence, in gore, in the company of cut-throats, and the perpetual smell of stale bilge water? Ah! How often I have returned at midnight from a scene of carnage and sudden death, only to lock my cabin door, there to draw close to what is good and true, in the meditations of Marcus Aurelius, the maxims of Plato, the aphorisms of Goethe, and the life of St. Francis of Assisi. To escape the subtle encroachments of honesty, integrity, and good temper, I have plunged into crimes that would appal the prime minister of the Inferno itself. In vain! Day by day the longing for peace and order, the kindly talk of men, the sweet smiles of old mothers, and the shy friendship of little children, has grown upon me with overmastering power. I must and will break with this foul and demoniac existence. I will begin an unselfish life here and now! [*Seating himself and leaning*

A Course in Piracy

over table.] I have a proposal to make to you, my ambitious friend. In exchange for the untrammelled command of this ship, with all its personnel, baggage, and equipment, give me your cast-off clerical clothing, and I will take your Somerset Vicarage, there to go down to an honored and hallowed old age.

MARJORIBANKS. [*Blinking.*] Captain, you overwhelm me. The splendor of your idea dazzles my imagination. I cannot quite grasp it. How would we ever go about it?

CAPTAIN. Easy enough. Where is your curate's clothing?

MARJORIBANKS. Stuck in the dark corner behind the cook's galley. But how will you ever get to England?

CAPTAIN. In a boat. I keep one fully equipped and provisioned for private emergencies. With a bit of sail and a following wind, I'll sight the Lizard in ten days' time. This is destiny's moment! I'm off. Give me your hand and blessing. [*They shake hands and MARJORIBANKS starts to follow him out.*] No, remain here, make excuses for me, give me five minutes' start, and then soak it to them. Good-by, Captain of the *Orca*.

[*Waves hand and darts out.*]

MARJORIBANKS. [*Calling.*] Good-by, Reverend Mr. Sheer, and the best of luck. [*To himself, dropping in chair.*] Well, well. This looks like business. I'd better dip into my textbook a bit.

[*Picks up book from table, turns over leaves, and reads. Enter BILL, puffing.*]

BILL. Where's the capting? There's a 'urricane a-blowin' up, an' we wants horders on deck.

MARJORIBANKS. He's just stepped out.

Plays for Strolling Mummers

BILL. Tell 'im 'e's wanted on the bow deck, an' wanted bad. Stow my ditty bag, but this is goin' to be a noight.

[*Starts out.*]

MARJORIBANKS. Hold! [BILL *turns.*] Sh! Stand by me when the time comes, and there will be a whole box of cigars for you.

BILL. Roight you are, me 'ardy buckoneer. I'll be back in one sec.

[*Goes out.*]

MARJORIBANKS. This looks serious. Thank the fates, I brought my textbook along. [*Turns over leaves.*] Let me see—where's the index? Ah, here it is— "Storm—Directions in Case of."

[*Reads intently, lips moving. Enter GORILLA and BILL.*]

GORILLA. [*Looking round wildly.*] The skipper 'as skipped.

BILL. Wot yer torkin' abaout?

GORILLA. [*Looking under table and over walls.*] I tell you 'e's skipped—'e's deserted the ship. [*Seizes BILL.*] Three minutes ago I seen a man slip h'over the soide. But bein' hokkerpied, I pays no 'tention, thinkin' it was a h'ordinary dippin' water. But two minutes later I seen 'im a 'arf mile out—in a boat—an' a-rowin' loike fire an' 'ail. I puts me glass on 'im, an', crack me main-marst, but it was the Captain! An' lissen, 'e was wearin' a black suit an' a stiff collar buttoned up be-'ine!

BILL. Brain fever an' sooeysaide—that's wot it means. Scuttle me barge, but it's a lovely toime for it. 'Oo's to give the h'orders now with a forty-mile gyle blowin' up from the nor' west?

GORILLA. 'E was the larst pirat captin'g that was a

A Course in Piracy

seaman, too. Splice me 'ammock, but wot'll we do without a capting?

[*Three SAILORS rush in, panting.*]

BIGGEST. Orders, h'orders, sir! The ship'll be on 'er beam ends in 'arf a mo'.

SECOND SAILOR. We'll be drowned, sure.

THIRD SAILOR. Where's the Capting?

BILL. [*Taking off hat.*] Sunk at sea. Boys, our brave capting is no more.

GORILLA. [*Waving.*] Hurrah, there ain't no captin'! Come on, boys, 'taint no use fightin' this gyle without no skipper. We'll all git drunk and go down a-singin' cheerio.

[*MARJORIBANKS rises, throws off cloak and draws pistol.*]

MARJORIBANKS. [*Authoritatively.*] Yes, there is a captain.

CREW IN CHORUS. Where?

MARJORIBANKS. [*Slapping chest.*] He stands before you! On deck, you half-witted, flop-eared, double-jointed sons of a cross-eyed sea cook, or I'll blow your soft-boiled snips of a brain out. On deck and up the rigging! Put the helm hard-a-port and swing the ship's head into the wind! Batten down the hatches and lash everything fast! First mate, at the wheel! Second mate, in the bows! Third mate, at the stern! Swing out the life boats and loosen all the tackle! Man the crow's nest and watch out for breakers! Furl the canvas down tight and let her run bare! On deck and in the rigging, me hearties, an—and— [*Snaps fingers in disgust. While crew stands rooted* MARJORIBANKS *hastily consults book, finds place, waves pistol and reads from book loudly.*] Furl! Furl! furl!

[*CREW gives cheer and rushes out both doors.*]

Plays for Strolling Mummers

BILL. Hurrah, boys, we are syved!

[MARJORIBANKS *alone sinks into chair and breathes heavily.*]

MARJORIBANKS.[*Soliloquizing.*] Good job I memorized that passage. But it was a precious narrow squeeze when I forgot how it ended. At any rate, it proved conclusively that in the case of emergencies, there is nothing like thorough planning and complete preparation beforehand. It looks as if I'm in for an exacting but perfectly gorgeous life.

CURTAIN



HARLEQUIN. And now, dear friends, with a little play by W. S. Gilbert we will bring our performance to a conclusion. It is a delightful little trifle and with it we will obey the old dictum of sending you home laughing.

[HARLEQUIN bows and the curtains close.]

CREATURES OF IMPULSE

A Musical Comedy

BY W. S. GILBERT

CREATURES OF IMPULSE

CHARACTERS

SERGEANT KLOOQUE	MARTHA, landlady of the
BOOMBLEHARDT, a miser	Three Pigeons
PETER, a young farmer	PIPETTE, her niece
JACQUES, a villager	A STRANGE OLD LADY

VILLAGERS

SCENE: *Exterior of the Three Pigeons, a country inn; entrance to inn, right; entrance through gate, center.*

JACQUES and VILLAGERS *discovered.*

OPENING CHORUS

Did you ever know a lady
So particularly shady,
Though a very nice old party she was thought to be?
I could see upon my honor,
When I first set eyes upon her,
That she wasn't any better than she ought to be.

[*Enter BOOMBLEHARDT, left, with a very large bag of gold—they shake hands with him.*]

BOOMBLEHARDT. I give you good morning, ladies.
I give you good morning, Peter.

JACQUES. What, for nothing?

BOOMBLEHARDT. Yes, I don't charge for it.

1ST VILLAGER. Why, Master Boomblehardt, you're getting liberal in your old age.

Plays for Strolling Mummers

BOOMBLEHARDT. Yes, my dear, yes—he's but a churl that keeps all his happiness to himself. It's a lovely day! the very trees are waving their long arms in ecstasy at the bright blue sky above them, and the bright green fields below them; and the pretty little birds are caroling a hymn of gratitude from their very topmost branches. It is indeed a good morning, and I give it you—I give it you!

JACQUES. You've got some more happiness in that long bag of yours, if one may judge by the chink of it. Can't you spare some of that?

BOOMBLEHARDT. Ha, ha! Do you know what that is? It's go-o-o-old!

2ND VILLAGER. All gold?

BOOMBLEHARDT. Yes, my dear, all go-o-o-old! It's my poor little rents that I've been collecting.

1ST VILLAGER. And are you going to keep it all to yourself?

BOOMBLEHARDT. No, no, I'm not so bad as that! I'm going to give you a little treat with it—a little treat.

ALL. A treat!

BOOMBLEHARDT. Yes, my dears, a treat! Have you any money of your own?

2ND VILLAGER. Not a penny.

BOOMBLEHARDT. Not a penny? Very good. The greatest pleasure in this world is the possession of money. Now that is a pleasure you can't have, because you don't possess any. The next greatest pleasure is looking at other people's money, and it's in my power to give you that pleasure, and shall I grudge it to you? No! See! [*Handling gold.*] Isn't it pretty! It's all go-o-o-old! Real golden guineas!

ALL. Oh, shabby, shabby!

BOOMBLEHARDT. There's gratitude for you! Well,

Creatures of Impulse

it's the way of the world; but, do what I will, I cannot please people. Where's Mistress Martha?

[*Enter* PETER.]

PETER. She's inside, trying to induce her strange old lady to go.

BOOMBLEHARDT. What strange old lady?

PETER. Why, a wicked old woman who has been staying at the Three Pigeons for the last six weeks. She won't pay any rent, and she won't go; but here comes Martha—she'll tell you all about it.

[*Enter* MARTHA, *from inn, very angry.*]

MARTHA. Well, it's no use, she won't budge.

BOOMBLEHARDT. How de do, Mistress Martha, I give you good morning. I've been collecting my rents, and I want a room at the Three Pigeons to-night.

MARTHA. Do you? Then you can't have one.

[*Sitting.*]

BOOMBLEHARDT. Can't have one?

MARTHA. No. Unless my strange old lady turns out. And she won't!

1ST VILLAGER. But why don't you seize her baggage?

MARTHA. She hasn't got any.

2ND VILLAGER. Stop her food, then!

MARTHA. I have, and she doesn't mind that. She's eaten nothing at all for three weeks.

3RD VILLAGER. Nothing at all for three weeks?

MARTHA. Nothing whatever!

3RD VILLAGER. Why, she'll be starved!

MARTHA. No; she says she never felt better in her life. She says that food always disagrees with her!

PETER. It disagrees with me sometimes, but I take it for all that!

1ST VILLAGER. Why don't you turn her out neck and crop?

Plays for Strolling Mummers

MARTHA. Turn out a woman who can live on nothing for three weeks? Why, she's a fairy! She'd be in again through the keyhole in a twinkling!

PETER. I know how to prevent that.

MARTHA. How?

PETER. Stuff up the keyhole.

MARTHA. Peter, you're a goose.

[Enter PIPETTE, running from left upper entrance.]

PIPETTE. Oh, aunt, aunt! I've such news for you! [Sees VILLAGERS.] Oh, I didn't know anybody was here. Oh, I beg your pardon! Oh, gracious! Oh, how extremely awkward!

MARTHA. Why, what's the matter with the girl?

PIPETTE. Oh, I'm so confused!

MARTHA. Why, what has confused you?

PIPETTE. Oh, it's all these people! Oh, please go away! Oh, I can't bear people!

BOOMBLEHARDT. Why, bless the girl, how shy she is!

MARTHA. Shy! there isn't a greater donkey in the country. Why, there's a portrait of her great grandfather in her bedroom, and she always turns its face to the wall before she does her hair.

PIPETTE. Well, I've been properly brought up. A young girl can't be too particular.

PETER. But what has happened?

PIPETTE. Oh, I can't tell you before all these people! Oh, please send them away!

1ST VILLAGER. Oh, I'm sure, if we're in the way—
[Exit into inn.]

2ND VILLAGER. If it's very improper, we wouldn't hear it for the world. But I dare say Mr. Boombledhardt and Peter won't mind.

[Exit into inn.]

Creatures of Impulse

3RD VILLAGER. Put it to them as delicately as you can, Jenny. A young girl can't be too particular.

[*Exit into inn.*]

BOOMBLEHARDT. Well, now that they're gone, what is it? If it's impudence, whisper!

PIPETTE. Oh, if you please it's a sergeant. and he's coming here!

MARTHA. A sergeant! Well, and what is there to blush at in that?

PIPETTE. Oh, but he's such a long sergeant! You can't think what a long sergeant he is! And, oh, if you please, he's got a mustache and all sorts of dreadful things.

MARTHA. A sergeant? It must be the famous Sergeant Klooque, who distinguished himself at Johannesburg—he's the bravest soldier in His Majesty's service. This is his native village, and he wrote to me to say that he would be here in the course of the week—on furlough. He's going to make the Three Pigeons his headquarters.

PIPETTE. A live sergeant coming to stop with us?

MARTHA. Certainly.

PIPETTE. Oh, then, if you please, and if it's quite convenient, I should like to retire from the world and go into a monastery.

MARTHA. A monastery? So should I.

PIPETTE. Oh, if you please, I mean a nunnery.

PETER. A nunnery? So should I.

MARTHA. Nonsense; stop here and welcome the brave gentleman, and if you don't do it well you shall marry Peter to-morrow. Now, Master Boumblehardt, if you'll step into the house we'll see what we can do for you.

BOOMBLEHARDT. By all means. Allow me to present you with. . . .

Plays for Strolling Mummers

MARTHA. With what, for gracious sake?

BOOMBLEHARDT. My arm.

[*Exeunt BOOMBLEHARDT and MARTHA into the house.*]

PIPETTE. [*Crying.*] Oh, dear, oh, dear, what shall I do? I don't know how to welcome a brave gentleman.

PETER. Don't welcome him.

PIPETTE. But if I don't I shall have to marry you to-morrow.

PETER. Never mind—it'll serve me right.

PIPETTE. But I hate brave gentlemen.

PETER. But I am not a brave gentleman.

PIPETTE. You? You're the greatest coward between this and Trent.

PETER. I *am* a coward.

PIPETTE. I hate a brave gentleman, but I detest a coward.

PETER. All men are cowards.

PIPETTE. What? Jacques Bonpré, who gave you that thrashing at Bontemps fair, and Pierre Pontois, who tied you on your horse wrong side before, for trotting over his turnips? And Jean Leroux, who dragged you through a horse pond for plundering his egg-roosts?

PETER. All cowards! I've a theory about that. In danger, all men are equally frightened, but some men have the power of concealing their fears—others haven't. I'm one of those who haven't. Some men are afraid to own that they are frightened—other men are not. I'm one of those who are not.

PIPETTE. Well, at all events Sergeant Klooque is a brave man, and I advise you to be civil to him. Oh, dear, oh, dear, what shall I do? How I do hate a man!

PETER. So do I.

Creatures of Impulse

PIPETTE. Oh, how I wish the world was full of women!

PETER. So do I.

PIPETTE. Now, I'm not at all afraid of women.

PETER. No more am I.

PIPETTE. I like women.

PETER. So do I!

PIPETTE. But men are so—so—so—

PETER. Oh, they are—

PIPETTE. What?

PETER. So—so. Very so—so.

PIPETTE. I mean they are so fond of staring at one, and putting their arms round one's waist, and squeezing one's hand.

PETER. Yes, it's their way; I've done it myself.

PIPETTE. They wink, too.

PETER. Yes, they would.

PIPETTE. Now, women never wink at me. They let me alone.

PETER. They let me alone, too, worse luck.

PIPETTE. You can say what you like to a woman—at least I mean I can. But I can't even look at a man.

PETER. You can look at me.

PIPETTE. I don't call you a man.

PETER. Well, don't call *him* a man, and then you can say what you like to him. He won't mind it.

PIPETTE. That's impudent.

PETER. It's meant to be.

PIPETTE. If you want to be impudent, why don't you be impudent to a man?

PETER. Oh, I should be a fool! Why, he'd box my ears!

PIPETTE. And you pretend to love me!

PETER. Exactly—I pretend to love you. That's all. It amuses you and gratifies me. [*Aside.*] I'll show

Plays for Strolling Mummers

her that she's not going to ride roughshod over me!
[*Aloud.*] You've got my snug little farm in your eye.

PIPETTE. Peter!

PETER. Well?

PIPETTE. Peter, you're a pig!

PETER. A pig?

PIPETTE. A pig!

PETER. Then you've got my snug little sty in your eye!

[*Enter* SERGEANT KLOOQUE.]

SERGEANT. Young lady, I salute you! The hero of Johannesburg salutes you!

PIPETTE. Oh, my goodness, he's going to salute me! Peter, if he salutes me, I'll scream.

SERGEANT. The young lady appears alarmed?

PETER. The young lady is very shy.

SERGEANT. Shy?

PETER. Yes. You soldiers are such disreputable dogs.

PIPETTE. Oh, yes, if you please, sir, you soldiers are such disreputable dogs! Oh, if you please, I didn't mean that! Oh, my! what a dreadful thing to have said!

SERGEANT. Some soldiers are—but not the hussars of the King's Body Guard. Our Colonel is extremely particular.

SERGEANT. A soldier of the King's hussars,
Although a gallant son of Mars;
To no one may he be gallant,
Except his mother and his aunt!

ALL. Except his mother and his aunt!

PIPETTE. A very proper rule indeed,
And one that surely should succeed.

PETER. But don't you find it rather slow—
Monotonous, in fact?

Creatures of Impulse

SERGEANT. Oh, no!
Each warrior who joins our corps,
Can count his mothers by the score;
And as for aunts—as I'm alive—
Each grenadier has thirty-five!
ALL. Each grenadier has thirty-five.
PETER. I shouldn't like to serve with him;
One's aunts are elderly and grim.
PIPETTE. One's mother's too, as facts will show,
Are always aged dames.
SERGEANT. Oh, no!
The grimmest aunt in all our corps,
Is seventeen—or little more;
The oldest mother's age may be,
A little short of twenty-three!

ENSEMBLE

PETER AND PIPETTE. Oh, Sergeant, I begin to take!
I'm much afraid that you're a rake!
SERGEANT. My meaning they begin to take,
It's pretty clear that I'm a rake!
[Enter MARTHA from inn.]
MARTHA. Sergeant Klooque, as I'm alive.
SERGEANT. Mistress Martha! Why, how pretty
you're grown.
MARTHA. This is indeed a distinction you have conferred on us!
PIPETTE. Oh!
MARTHA. Well, what's the matter with the girl?
PIPETTE. Oh, if you please, I was thinking that the
sergeant has had so many distinctions conferred on
him, that he can afford to spare us one. Oh, if you
please, I didn't mean that! Oh, dear, what have I
said!
MARTHA. And what a big man you've grown! Why,
you were a little drummer boy when you left us, and
now you're a gigantic sergeant!
SERGEANT. Yes, I've risen in the service.

Plays for Strolling Mummers

PETER. And some day, I suppose, you'll be an officer?

SERGEANT. Yes—but that will be a long time first.

PIPETTE. Oh!

ALL. Well?

PIPETTE. Oh, if you please, I was thinking, if you're six foot long as a sergeant, how long will you be before you're a captain? Oh, if you please, I didn't mean that! Oh, my! I wish I hadn't spoken.

MARTHA. Pipette, you're a goose. [*To SERGEANT.*] But we're very glad to see you, and I hope you'll make the Three Pigeons your home as long as your furlough lasts.

SERGEANT. With pleasure, Martha. I've been roughing for the last six months, and it's no little treat to look forward to six weeks' holiday in a pretty inn, in a pretty village, with a pretty landlady to look after one's wants.

[*Puts his arm round her waist.*]

PIPETTE. Oh, if you please, aunt, perhaps your son would like to see his room.

MARTHA. My son?

PIPETTE. Your nephew, then?

MARTHA. My nephew?

PIPETTE. Oh, if you please, I thought he must be one or the other, as his Colonel is very strict, and only allows his soldiers to kiss their mothers or their aunts. Oh, dear, I wish I hadn't said that! Oh, my! what a dreadful thing to have said!

SERGEANT. When a soldier is on furlough, discipline is relaxed. [*Kisses MARTHA.*] But why are you sighing?

MARTHA. I'm thinking of my old lady. She won't pay my rent, and she's eaten nothing and drunk nothing

Creatures of Impulse

for a fortnight, and she looks as plump as ever! [*Mysteriously.*] She's a fairy!

PETER. Bah!

MARTHA. Eh?

PETER. Stuff! I don't believe it.

MARTHA. And why?

PETER. Fairies do everything with a wand, don't they?

MARTHA. Well?

PETER. Well, she cleans her teeth with a toothbrush, I've seen her.

MARTHA. Peter, you're a goose!

PIPETTE. I say, Peter.

PETER. Well?

PIPETTE. It'll be a bad lookout for you and me about Michaelmas!

SERGEANT. Suppose we tackle the old lady by turns.

MARTHA. Ah, but who'll begin?

PETER. [*Boldly.*] I will.

ALL. You.

PETER. I. She's no more a fairy than I am—she's an ugly old woman, and I'd rather tackle one ugly old woman than a dozen handsome men. Afraid of an old woman! Why, the older they are the less I fear 'em!

[*Exeunt* PIPETTE, MARTHA, and SERGEANT, to house, right. *Enter* OLD LADY, center.]

PETER. Now for it. I say, old lady!

OLD LADY. Well, young man?

PETER. I've a bone to pick with you.

OLD LADY. Can't stop, my time's valuable.

PETER. Oh, but you must.

OLD LADY. Must, eh?

PETER. Do you see that? [*Showing his arm.*] Feel it.

OLD LADY. Mercy, what a ridiculous little arm!

Plays for Strolling Mummers

PETER. [*Pointing to biceps.*] Do you know what that is?

OLD LADY. Well, I can guess!

PETER. What is it?

OLD LADY. I suppose it's the bone you're going to pick with me. We may spare ourselves the trouble—there's very little on it.

PETER. [*In a rage.*] I say, I'm not accustomed to stand that sort of thing from a woman of your age, you know.

OLD LADY. Do you know my age?

PETER. About eighty, I should say. [*Aside.*] That'll put her back up!

OLD LADY. Eighty! Nonsense, I'm eight hundred and forty-two.

PETER. Well, you don't look it.

OLD LADY. Peter, you're a dangerous little man!

PETER. I am a dangerous little man as you'll discover. Now, look here, ma'am.

OLD LADY. I'm all attention, Peter.

PETER. You've been here six weeks.

OLD LADY. True.

PETER. You've paid no rent.

OLD LADY. None.

PETER. You don't mean to pay any.

OLD LADY. Not a penny.

PETER. You don't eat anything.

OLD LADY. Nothing.

PETER. You don't drink anything.

OLD LADY. Not a drop.

PETER. And if you did you wouldn't pay for it.

OLD LADY. Not a penny.

PETER. Now hasn't it occurred to you that on the whole you're not a profitable customer?

Creatures of Impulse

OLD LADY. Yes, that reflection has occurred to me. But look at it from my point of view. If you could get all you wanted from a first-rate inn without paying for it, how long would you stop there?

PETER. I should stop there until somebody did to me what I'm going to do to you.

OLD LADY. What's that?

PETER. Turn you out. Come—toddle—trundle—vanish!

[*He squares up to her as if about to strike her.*]

OLD LADY. Why, Peter, would you strike an old woman?

PETER. Why not? You're as big as I am. Besides you've less to lose. You are very ugly, and no amount of thrashing would make you uglier than you are. Now I am very beautiful, and a tap on the nose would play the very deuce with me! Come—toddle!

[*Squares up at her.*]

OLD LADY. Very well, Peter, you're a coward to square up at an old woman, and as a punishment you will be so good as to go on squaring up to every one you meet and telling them to "Come on!" until further notice.

PETER. What, squaring up like this? [*Squaring.*] Come on!

OLD LADY. Yes, just like that.

PETER. What, at everybody I come across? [*Squaring.*] Come on!

OLD LADY. Yes, at everybody you come across.

PETER. Big and little! [*Squaring.*] Come on!

OLD LADY. Yes, big and little.

PETER. [*Howling.*] But they won't like it. [*Squaring.*] Come on!

OLD LADY. Not a bit.

PETER. They'll hit me back! Come on!

Plays for Strolling Mummers

OLD LADY. I hope so.

PETER. [*Squaring very fiercely and hitting out right and left, and howling all the time.*] Oh, please don't make me go on squaring at every one like this. Come on!

OLD LADY. Must be done, Peter!

PETER. But here's the sergeant coming. Must I square up to him? He's six feet high. Come on!

OLD LADY. That's unlucky; but it must be done.

PETER. I think I'll go. Come on!

OLD LADY. I think you'd better.

[*PETER goes off, squaring, hitting out violently, and crying out, "Come on!"*]

[*Enter SERGEANT, from inn, and stares at him in astonishment.*]

SERGEANT. Is the young man unwell?

OLD LADY. No, he's quite well. He's practicing his boxing.

SERGEANT. What for?

OLD LADY. He says you flirt with Pipette, and he's going to give you a thrashing.

SERGEANT. Ho, ho, ho! Now, my dear little old lady, I'm going to beg a favor of you.

OLD LADY. Go away, soldier chap, I hate soldier chaps! Do you know what effect a red coat has on me? It drives me mad.

SERGEANT. You're not the only lady it affects in that way. I've brought you a message from Mistress Martha. She wants you to go.

OLD LADY. Go?

SERGEANT. Go! Come, old lady [*puts his arm round her waist*], be reasonable.

OLD LADY. Go away, soldier! I hate soldiers. Go away!

[*Strikes at him with her crutch.*]

Creatures of Impulse

SERGEANT. I say—gently, old lady!

[*Ducking to avoid crutch.*]

OLD LADY. Go away, I say! You're a dissipated fellow to dare to put your arms round an unprotected woman's waist! You wouldn't do it if my papa were here!

[*Thrashes him with crutch.*]

SERGEANT. Confound it, ma'am; your stick hurts! [*Ducking.*] Don't, ma'am, don't! [*Ducks.*] Don't, I say!

[*Ducks.*]

OLD LADY. And as a punishment for your impertinence, you will be so good as to go on ducking and dodging, and saying "Don't!" to every one you meet, until further notice.

SERGEANT. What, like this? [*Ducking.*] Don't!

OLD LADY. Yes, like that.

SERGEANT. But they'll think I'm afraid of 'em! [*Ducking.*] Don't!

OLD LADY. Sure to!

SERGEANT. But I'm not afraid of any one! Don't!

OLD LADY. No, you are the bravest man in the army!

SERGEANT. I shall lose my reputation! I shall be branded as a coward! Don't!

[*Enter PIPETTE from inn; she stares at SERGEANT in astonishment.*]

PIPETTE. Oh, if you please, Mistress Martha's compliments, and have you been successful?

SERGEANT. No, she won't go! [*Ducking.*] Don't!

PIPETTE. I wasn't going to. Oh! if you please, what's the matter?

SERGEANT. Oh, it's nothing! It'll pass off. [*Ducking.*] Don't!

PIPETTE. Wouldn't you like to lie down? I'm not going to hurt you.

Plays for Strolling Mummers

SERGEANT. No, no, my dear, I'm quite well. [*Ducking.*] Don't! don't!

PIPETTE. It's your fun, I suppose?

SERGEANT. Exactly. It's my fun!

[*Ducking.*]

OLD LADY. He's showing you how he fought the enemy at Johannesburg.

SERGEANT. No, my dear! I'm showing you how the enemy fought us. This is the way they retreated. Don't! don't! don't!

[*Exit SERGEANT, ducking and backing.*]

PIPETTE. What a strange young man!

OLD LADY. He's a very rude young man.

PIPETTE. Rude?

OLD LADY. Yes. He put his arm round my waist.

PIPETTE. Are you his mother?

OLD LADY. No, my dear, I'm not.

PIPETTE. Nor his aunt?

OLD LADY. No.

PIPETTE. Then I'll tell his Colonel, and he'll be flogged!

OLD LADY. I should like to see him flogged.

PIPETTE. So should I! Oh my, what am I saying? Oh, dear, I didn't mean that!

OLD LADY. Well, my dear, and what do you want?

PIPETTE. I want to ask you a great—great favor.

OLD LADY. Yes?

PIPETTE. You're such a dear old lady, that I'm sure you'll grant it.

OLD LADY. Yes, I'm a pleasant old person.

PIPETTE. Although you're past your prime, you've such bright eyes, and such red cheeks, and such a happy expression of countenance, that you're prettier than many a young girl I know.

Creatures of Impulse

OLD LADY. Yes, I'm attractive—attractive, nothing more.

PIPETTE. Well, you're such a dear old lady, and I'm so fond of you, and you've made yourself so pleasant and so agreeable, that what I want you to do is to—is to—

OLD LADY. Yes, is to—is to?

PIPETTE. Is to go.

OLD LADY. Go?

PIPETTE. Go. You see, they don't appreciate you as much as I do. I think you're a dear old lady—perhaps the dearest old lady I ever saw, but they don't.

OLD LADY. Oh, they don't?

PIPETTE. No, I can't understand it, but it is so. Now, I'm sure you're too proud—too noble—too high-spirited to remain where you're not wanted. Aren't you, you dear—dear old lady? [*Kisses her.*] Oh, I declare I could kiss those cherry cheeks all day long!

OLD LADY. All day long?

PIPETTE. All day long!

[*Kisses her.*]

OLD LADY. Very good—you're telling stories, my dear, and must be punished. As a punishment you will be so good as to go about offering to kiss and fondle every one you meet, until further notice.

PIPETTE. What, like that? [*Makes kissing noise.*] Kiss me!

OLD LADY. Yes, like that!

PIPETTE. But people will think it so odd. Kiss me!

OLD LADY. Yes, they'll be surprised at first.

PIPETTE. But I say—gentlemen and all? Kiss me!

OLD LADY. Yes, gentlemen and all.

PIPETTE. But they won't like it!

OLD LADY. Oh, no, they won't mind it.

Plays for Strolling Mummers

PIPETTE. But I'm so shy! I can't look at a gentleman without blushing. Kiss me!

OLD LADY. Oh, you'll get over your shyness after a year or two of that sort of thing.

PIPETTE. Kiss me! Oh, dear, oh, dear, I don't know what people will say! Kiss me!

OLD LADY. I do. They'll say you quiet ones are always the worst. And so you are.

[*Enter BOOMBLEHARDT from inn.*]

PIPETTE. Oh, dear, here's that disgusting old wretch, Boombleshardt. I hate the sight of him! [*To BOOMBLEHARDT.*] Kiss me.

BOOMBLEHARDT. Certainly, my dear.

[*Kisses her.*]

PIPETTE. How dare you take such a liberty! You insolent old man! Kiss me.

BOOMBLEHARDT. Again! Why, of course.

[*Kisses her.*]

PIPETTE. Oh, you disgusting old man! [*Boxes his ears.*] I'll tell my aunt, and she'll turn you out of doors, and you shall be hooted through the village. Kiss me.

BOOMBLEHARDT. [*Puzzled.*] Thank you—no more this morning.

PIPETTE. Thank you, I'm sure! Oh, dear, oh, dear! What shall I do?

[*Exit crying into house.*]

BOOMBLEHARDT. What a very strange girl.

OLD LADY. [*Seated.*] I am a very strange girl.

BOOMBLEHARDT. Ah—I was not referring to you. But I want a word with you. I want to make a bargain with you.

OLD LADY. Well, get on.

BOOMBLEHARDT. Well, Mistress Martha has sent me to induce you to go; but I don't want to do anything

Creatures of Impulse

of the kind. I want you to stay. So if you'll fall in with my views, I'll do all I can to prevent their turning you out.

OLD LADY. Well, what are your views?

BOOMBLEHARDT. You have a wonderful gift of living without food.

OLD LADY. Yes—I have that gift.

BOOMBLEHARDT. For the last fifty years I've been trying to master that wonderful secret, but in vain. It's true I've brought myself down to one hard-boiled egg and a tea-cup full of soup *per diem*, but I find even that a great drain on my resources. Now, if you'll teach me how to live comfortably—I don't say luxuriously, but comfortably—on nothing at all, I'll give you—yes, I'll give you a guinea!

OLD LADY. You'll give me a guinea?

BOOMBLEHARDT. Yes—half down and half by a bill at six months. Well, come—say a guinea down. There, look at it! A whole guinea! Weigh it! Taste it! Look at the milling. Oh, it's a beautiful guinea!

[*She takes it and tests it.*]

OLD LADY. You're a very mean old man, and you must be punished for it. You'll have the goodness to go on offering guineas from your long bag to every one you meet until further notice.

BOOMBLEHARDT. What, like this—Allow me to offer you a guinea?

OLD LADY. Thank you. [*Takes it.*] Yes, like that.

BOOMBLEHARDT. To every one I meet?

OLD LADY. Yes, to every one you meet.

BOOMBLEHARDT. Allow me to offer you a guinea!

OLD LADY. With pleasure, Mr. Boumblehardt.

[*Takes it.*]

BOOMBLEHARDT. [*In dismay.*] But people who don't know me will think I'm making them a present!

Plays for Strolling Mummers

OLD LADY. No doubt of it.

BOOMBLEHARDT. But I never made a present in my life!

OLD LADY. Then it's high time you began.

[*Going.*]

BOOMBLEHARDT. Are you going?

OLD LADY. Yes, I have some charms to work.

BOOMBLEHARDT. I don't see them. Allow me to offer you a guinea.

OLD LADY. Thank you—don't go that way or you'll meet Peter. Now to have a word or two with Mistress Martha.

[*Exit into inn.*]

BOOMBLEHARDT. Here's a pretty state of things! Ruin stares me in the face!

[*Enter SERGEANT.*]

SERGEANT. I must see the old lady—I can't stand this any longer. [*Sees BOOMBLEHARDT and begins to duck and back.*] Don't! Don't!

BOOMBLEHARDT. Allow me, sir, to offer you a guinea.

SERGEANT. You're very good, but— Don't, don't!

BOOMBLEHARDT. I can't help it—I must! An irresistible impulse compels me to keep on going like this. Allow me to offer you a guinea.

SERGEANT. [*Taking it.*] Please understand that when I say don't, I don't mean don't; I say don't because an irresistible impulse compels me to say don't! don't! don't!

BOOMBLEHARDT. Don't be frightened, young man, I am not going to hurt you.

SERGEANT. Don't! don't!

BOOMBLEHARDT. Not for worlds.

SERGEANT. I tell you I say "don't," in compliance with an irresistible impulse. It's a spell.

Creatures of Impulse

BOOMBLEHARDT. Dear me, this is extremely curious. [*Sitting and examining SERGEANT critically through eyeglass, as he bobs and ducks all over the stage.*] A purely reflex action of the muscles of the neck and shoulders. Allow me to offer you a guinea.

SERGEANT. Don't, don't! I wish you'd go.

BOOMBLEHARDT. My dear sir, I may as well hand my guineas to you as to anybody else; and you amuse me very much, you make me laugh. Ha! ha!

SERGEANT. Hang the fellow, how shall I get rid of him? Stop, here's Pipette—I have it! I'll back from Pipette on to him!

[*Enter PIPETTE from house, SERGEANT turns to her and backs from her on to BOOMBLEHARDT'S toes.*]

BOOMBLEHARDT. Here, I say, sir, look where you're coming to!

[*SERGEANT backs him off the stage.*]

SERGEANT. Thank heaven, he's gone at **last!**

PIPETTE. [*To SERGEANT.*] Kiss me!

SERGEANT. Eh? [*Ducking.*] Don't!

PIPETTE. I can't help it. Kiss me!

SERGEANT. Don't! don't!

PIPETTE. Don't be angry, sergeant, but it's an irresistible impulse. Kiss me!

SERGEANT. I'm not angry—I like it. Don't, don't!

[*Enter PETER, squaring.*]

PETER. Hallo, Jenny, kissing Sergeant Klooque! Come on!

PIPETTE. Please, Peter, I can't help it. It's an irresistible impulse. Kiss me!

[*To PETER.*]

PETER. Come on! Come on!

[*Squaring—he squares at SERGEANT who ducks.*]

Plays for Strolling Mummers

PIPETTE. Oh, dear, oh, dear, they're going to fight about me. My character will be gone in no time!

PETER. Come on! Come on!

SERGEANT. Don't, don't!

PETER. Please don't be angry, Sergeant, but I'm compelled to hit you. I am acting under an irresistible impulse.

SERGEANT. And don't you suppose I'm ducking and dodging because I'm afraid of you. I, too, am acting under an irresistible impulse.

[*Enter BOOMBLEHARDT.*]

BOOMBLEHARDT. [*To SERGEANT.*] Allow me to offer you a guinea.

SERGEANT. Sir, I have great pleasure in taking it.

[*PETER hits BOOMBLEHARDT on the back.*]

BOOMBLEHARDT. [*To PETER.*] Allow me to offer you a guinea.

PETER. A guinea? Thank you! Come on!

BOOMBLEHARDT. [*To PIPETTE.*] Pipette, allow me to offer you a guinea.

PIPETTE. You're a disreputable old scamp! Kiss me, kiss me!

[*Enter MARTHA and VILLAGERS from inn.*]

MARTHA. [*To VILLAGERS, pushing them all away.*] Go away! go away! Get out of this—get out of this!

SERGEANT. [*Ducking.*] Why, Martha, what's the matter?

MARTHA. Don't be frightened, Sergeant—I don't mean it. I tried with my three servants just now to make the old lady go, and she compels us to turn everybody out of my inn until further notice! Why, I shall be ruined! Go away—get out of this!

[*To one and all in succession.*]

BOOMBLEHARDT. Allow me, ma'am, to offer you a guinea.

Creatures of Impulse

MARTHA. Certainly; thank you—go away.

BOOMBLEHARDT. Another.

MARTHA. Thank you—go away. [*To the others.*]
Go away—get out of this—go away.

PIPETTE. [*To SERGEANT.*] Kiss me, kiss me!

PETER. [*To SERGEANT.*] Come on, come on!

SERGEANT. Don't, don't, don't!

MARTHA. Go away! go away—get out of this—go away!

BOOMBLEHARDT. Allow me to offer you a guinea.

[*To all in succession. Enter OLD LADY from inn—
they all rush to her.*]

MARTHA. [*Pushing her.*] Go away—go away!

VILLAGERS. Get out of this—go away!

PETER. Come on, come on!

SERGEANT. [*Apart from the others.*] Don't, don't!

PIPETTE. Kiss me! kiss me!

[*Trying to kiss OLD LADY.*]

BOOMBLEHARDT. Allow me to offer you a guinea.

[*They hustle her about the stage.*]

OLD LADY. Stop! stop! stop! [*They all desist.*]
I release you all. [*All relapse.*] I can manage you
separately, but altogether you're too many for me!
The spell is removed!

MARTHA. Then you'll go?

OLD LADY. [*Sulkily.*] Yes—I'll go.

PIPETTE. [*To SERGEANT.*] Then you're not a
coward?

SERGEANT. A coward? No! And you don't want
to kiss everybody?

PIPETTE. Kiss everybody? No! [*To PETER.*] And
you're not a brave man?

PETER. A brave man? No! [*To MARTHA.*] And
you don't want to turn everybody out of your inn?

MARTHA. Out of my inn? No! [*To BOOMBLE-*

Plays for Strolling Mummers

HARDT.] And you don't want to give everybody a guinea?

BOOMBLEHARDT. Give everybody a guinea? No, I'll be hanged if I do!

(Finale.)

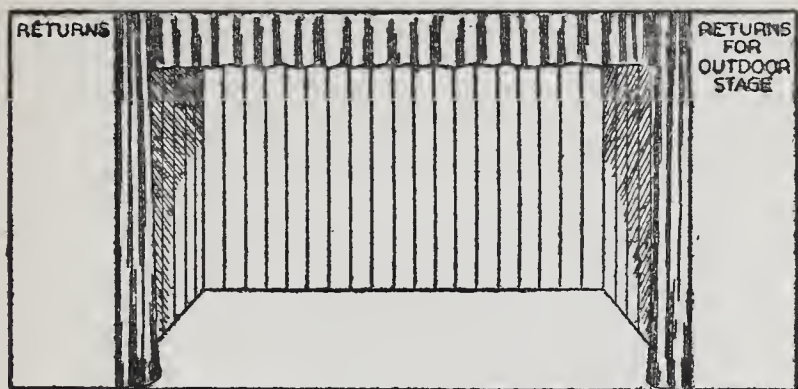
ALL. Go away, ma'am, go away, ma'am,
Go away, ma'am, good day!

OLD LADY. Defeated
And ill-treated,
I'm vindictive as you'll find,
So prepare you,
For to spare you,
I am not at all inclined!

ALL. Go away, ma'am, etc.

[They hustle her out of the gate.]

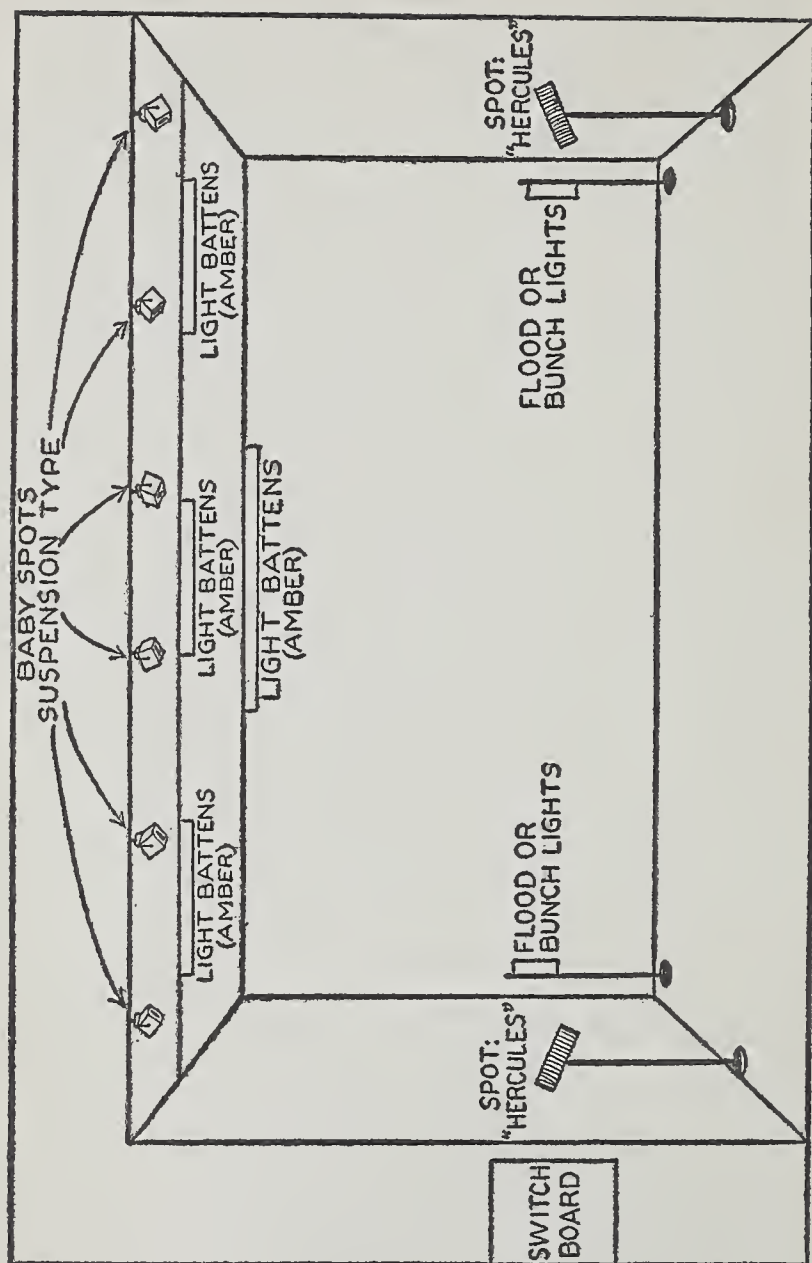
CURTAIN



PLAN FOR STAGE SHOWING CURTAINS

NOTE

The stage used by the strolling mummers is extraordinarily simple in construction. It is, of course, on a raised platform and is surrounded by curtains of light gray material. These curtains hang in their original commercial lengths, not sewn. Along the selvage are sewn snap fasteners at intervals of six inches. The curtains hang from a running wire or pipe on which they run easily. This will enable us to move them to the right and left as required by the action of the play. (See page 176 for stage plan.)



PLAN OF STAGE AND LIGHTING FOR PLAYS FOR STROLLING MUMMERS.

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